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2021  
THE NIGHT FOSSICKERS, 22

AND OTHER

Australian Tales of Peril and Adventure.

BY

JAMES SKIPP BORLASE.



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1867.



TO  
HIS EXCELLENCY SIR CHARLES DARLING,  
K.C.B.,

LATE GOVERNOR OF THE COLONY OF VICTORIA,

*This Work*

IS BY SPECIAL PERMISSION RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED,

BY

HIS OBLIGED AND OBEDIENT SERVANT,

JAMES SKIPP BORLASE.





## PREFACE.

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IN the following pages are narrated scenes of real life and adventure, describing which the Author has as frequently as possible given pictures of Colonial life, which may be relied on as truthful and not too highly coloured. Thus the habits and manners of the aborigines, the pictures of outpost and station life, the description of a bush fire, the jottings of Colonial scenery, natural history, entomology, &c., are correct and unvarnished, and may recall to the mind of the returned colonist scenes and things which were once familiar to him; whilst at the same time they will enable those whose feet have never trodden Australian soil to picture to themselves the aspect and peculiar characteristics of that great southern land, with the habits of its peoples.



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## THE SHEPHERD'S HUT.

It was a bitter night in June; and although there was neither snow nor ice—for such phenomena rarely distinguish an Australian winter,—yet the damp, raw wind blew from the Southern Ocean with a hollow roar and a penetrating power that no great-coat could defy. In the old country I had often crossed St. James's Park at midnight in only a light dress coat, when the summit of the York Column and the roof of the Horse Guards' clock-tower glittered white in their snowy shroud, and the ornamental water slept beneath solid ice, yet never had I felt such a chilliness at the very bones as on this, to me, eventful evening in the year 1851, when, issuing from the long, irregularly-built wooden structure, dignified by the name of "Café de l'Europe," into Bourke Street, I made my way through the uneven, rut-wrinkled streets of Melbourne, towards the little inn called "The Golden Nugget," where I expected to find my horse and trap.

What magical changes do ten years sometimes produce! Can this princely city that I now behold, with its broad and well-paved gaslit streets, that would not disgrace the West End of London, and actually put to shame those of our great manufacturing capitals of Manchester, Liverpool, and Birmingham; this city, with its glittering shops, its noble public buildings, elegant churches and charitable institutions,—its theatres, concert halls, museums, libraries, giant warehouses and docks, its business and its riches; this city, that cries second to few of its century-aged rivals in the old world; can it indeed be the same as the comfortless, dreary spot of almost Siberian wretchedness that I knew fifteen years

since? Even now I can, methinks, see it in its past attire—rows of wooden huts, with their tin or shingle roofs, interspersed with tents, mud hovels, drinking booths, and here and there a row of stone houses lifting their heads above their humbler brethren; streets that might be better termed rivers of mud, with stumps of trees yet uncleared away in their midst; carts drawn by oxen or horses, struggling through the mire, and often hopelessly stuck in some deep rut; drivers swearing and cracking whips; diggers and adventurers often drunk and disorderly, reeling or trudging through the mud slough—for fragments of paving only existed here and there; emigrants sick and disheartened, sitting in despair on their sea-chests in the roadway, homeless and houseless, and unable to pay the guinea a bed and half-guinea a meal charged in the inns and grog-shops; while from within those inns, whose doors stood invitingly open for such as had a full purse, came the sounds of laughter and revelry, mingled with the scraping of fiddles, the clattering of glasses and cans, and occasionally the brutal oath or the fierce sounds of strife.

But I am rambling from my subject, and, what is worse, narrating an oft-told tale. Most of my readers, if they did not see, have yet been made familiar, in the pages of the colonial or home press, with the aspect of Melbourne at the first breaking out of the gold fever. It is during this stormy period that the incidents of my tale are laid, and that I first set foot on the shores of this great continent.

I did not come, however, as a seeker of the yellow metal—I had no ambition to become a digger. In fact, reason taught me then that which experience has since convinced me of—that he who, by hard toil, finds the gold, makes not so great a profit as he who, keeping to his trade or profession, wins by his brains, the wealth second-hand.

I was a detective police officer, and quitted the service at home for reasons which my conscience approved, and owing in great measure to an adventure which I have no space to relate here, but which would supply incidents for a more thrilling narrative than the present, in which form I may some day be tempted to make it public.

Bound by honour not again to exercise my calling in the old country, I had no scruple in doing so in the new; and

when I arrived at Melbourne in April, 1851, I found there was a good opening for me. The police arrangements were very ineffective—murders, stabbings, and other outrages were of frequent occurrence in the city; and throughout the country round prowling ruffians—escaped convicts from Sydney or Van Diemen's Land—were ever ready to waylay and murder the wandering digger for the sake of the gold they expected to find on his person.

One of the greatest scoundrels of the latter class had, by the number of murders he had committed, earned the cognomen of "Dick the Devil;" his outrages had extended to within a quarter of a mile of the town; he was wont to boast that he killed a man per week and robbed one each day, and so anxious was every one for his capture that one thousand pounds was offered for his body alive or dead.

This was the very worthy I was about to seek when I quitted the "Café de l'Europe" and turned my steps down Bourke Street on the evening in question.

I had come to the knowledge, how and by what means is irrelevant, that he would be at a hut a mile or so off the highway to Bundura at eleven o'clock that night. This hut was inhabited by a shepherd belonging to a neighbouring run, who was evidently through fear or inclination an accomplice of the ruffian. I did not, however, fear the odds against me, the reward offered was more than commensurate with the danger incurred. Had I taken a comrade that reward must have been shared, which I did not care for; the more particularly as the honour of the affair would have to be divided also.

A revolver and a bowie knife were my best friends, and the only thing that caused me annoyance was, that a recent kick from a horse prevented my crossing a saddle or walking very far; it would also prevent my running away if such a course were needed, but the necessity of the latter step I did not consider very probable.

Thus prevented from either walking or riding, I had as a *dernier resort* hired a light gig; for I knew the road to within a mile of the spot to be a pretty good one, and I could then hobble my horse and creep the rest of my way on foot.

I had arranged that this gig should be brought to me at



"The Golden Nugget" inn in Elizabeth Street, close to the post-office, and thither I now made my way, carefully picking my path so as to avoid the dangerous ruts and holes half full of water—a task which the few flickering oil lamps scarcely assisted me to perform. At last, however, I arrived at the spot named; the gig was awaiting me; I consulted my watch, it was nine o'clock, and as I had eight miles to drive and perhaps one to walk, it was time to be *en route*. So, after tossing off a nobbler of rum punch to keep the cold out, and examining the caps on my revolver, I clambered into my somewhat dilapidated vehicle, gathered up the reins, and whipped the raw-boned old mare into a trot.

The gleam of light from a few open pothouse doors enabled me to escape driving over the crowds of half-dressed children, mingled with dogs and goats, that seemed to divide the centre of the street between them; and in a few minutes the last straggling outskirts of the city were passed, and I was rattling along the road that leads to the now pretty little village of Flemington.

It should have been a light night, for the moon was nearly at its full, but the heavy masses of cloud only allowed her radiance to appear occasionally, and at other times the darkness was so intense that I could scarcely see my horse's head. This, however, I did not much heed; I knew that my raw-boned old mare knew every inch of the road; I had received information that I could not very well mistake as to the discovery of the shepherd's hut, and the peculiar business upon which I was engaged rendered darkness more welcome than light to me. I had proceeded in this way some three miles or so, with slackened reins, trusting to the instinct of the horse to find the way, when a shrill voice hailed me with "Arrah, yer honour, will ye be giving a puir lone woman a lift as far as the "Bell" at Bundura, and it's many thanks she'll offer ye for the throuble?"

Involuntarily I drew in my sorry nag at this sudden greeting, and as I did so the moonlight suddenly glinted out from a rift in the leaden clouds, and I beheld standing close to the roadside a gaunt and decrepit looking hag of some seventy years of age; her clothes a mere bundle of rags, and filthy-looking in the extreme; whilst from beneath a large mob-cap,

which once doubtless had been white, but now retained little evidence of the fact, a lock or two of straggling grey hair waved in the wind. In short, the appearance of this strange old woman resembled so closely one of the weird sisterhood in "Macbeth," that a more unattractive companion for a lonely night's drive could hardly be imagined.

"What are you doing here at this time of night, my friend?" I asked.

"Och, faith, yer honour, ye may well ask the question. Shure and it's the market I've been attending at all day, and then I bided to take a dish of tay wid a neighbour, and the night o'ertook us talking o' old times."

"Why did you not stop at your friend's all night then? it would have been wiser than tramping this lonely road at such an hour."

"Ah! I should anger the old man, yer worship, who's awaiting up for me at home; it's a pretty bit of a bating I shall catch as it is," she answered, in a shrill voice.

Not wishing to be delayed longer, and half believing her tale, I bid the old woman jump up, which she did with an alacrity not to be expected from her years, and the journey was resumed. For a mile or so my companion was silent, while I was too much absorbed in my own reflections to open a conversation. When, however, the two or three wooden houses that then composed the village of Flemington were passed, and the lights that had flashed from the windows of the little inn known as the "halfway house" had grown like tiny stars in our rear, my strange companion again found her tongue, and gabbled away with such garrulity that I began to grow doubtful whether she was insane, or rather the worse for "a drop of the crather." She continued thus for some distance, and I had begun to wish her at a region at least as remote as Jericho, when the moon again shone forth with a sudden radiance that for a moment quite dazzled my sight, and revealed the long straight road for miles in front, with the dark woods on either side, as clearly as if 'twere noonday. The ghastly white bark and sombre foliage of the gum trees and other eucalypti glittered in the light, but not a single thing of life was visible around.

It was at this moment that, glancing down to see that a

small bag containing handcuffs and a few other little implements of my craft had not fallen out of the gig, I perceived a strange object sticking out of the pocket of my companion. Could it be? I looked again. Yes, it was—the steel-mounted butt of a pistol—a genuine Colt's revolver! I knew it in an instant by the shape, and could scarcely refrain from giving a whistle of surprise, but I did control the impulse. I glanced at the face of the bearer, and now in the clear moonlight I could perceive that the deep wrinkles in the cheeks were skilfully put on with burnt cork, and that the straggling locks of grey hair were the fascinations of a wig.

I was clearly in a trap, my own fire-arms were buttoned over in my breast pocket; were I to drop either rein or whip, the suspicion of the bushranger, for I doubted not the profession of my companion, would be roused, and ere I could draw my own weapon I should have a bullet through my head. Although the gabbling conversation, in the cracked tones of an old woman, was still kept up, I saw that a careful survey was being taken of the neighbourhood, and I knew that one hand grasped the skirt pocket and the barrels of the pistol beneath the tattered plaid shawl.

"What strength can't accomplish, skill must," is an old axiom of my profession; so, turning round, I exclaimed, "I fear my horse has got a stone in his shoe; mother, you won't be afraid to hold the reins a minute whilst I jump down and see, will you?"

The careless and yet encouraging tones in which I spoke took my companion off his guard, I drew up and handed him the whip and reins; then rising as if to get out of the gig, I suddenly snatched the revolver from his pocket, and levelled it at his head, exclaiming, "You're my prisoner; move hand or foot, and I'll blow your brains out."

"Faith, Mr. Paaler, it's yourself has got the best of it, but ye can't be for arresting me, ye've no ividence I meant to do wrang."

"I'll be responsible for my acts, my lad. Now listen to me, obey me word for word, and no dodges; my finger's on the trigger, remember."

"All right, yer honour," answered the villain, perfectly cowed.

"On the seat you see a bag, drop the reins, the horse won't bolt, put the whip in its holder. Good. Now, then, the bag is unlocked, what do you see in it?"

"Bracelets, yer honour, and bad cess to them."

"Key in the lock?"

"Yes, yer honour."

"Then put them on."

The man hesitated. "Put them on, or I fire."

This time the fellow obeyed.

"Now place your hands in such a position that I can lock the handcuffs with my left hand."

This he also did. Placing the muzzle of the revolver against his forehead, and never taking my eye off his, for he looked mischievous, I locked his bracelets with my left hand, and put the key in my waistcoat pocket; then taking a piece of strong cord from the bag, I laid the pistol on the seat, and strongly bound his arms and legs.

"Now, my dear old lady," I said, as I finished, "next time you frequent Paddy's market, don't get benighted on your way home. I'll save you this time from a bating by the old man, but I may not be able to do so always."

"Curse you for a meddling fool!" was the answer, "the game may be in *my* hands next time; if so, my hearty, look out."

I made no reply to this, and was about to gather up the reins, for the adventure had delayed me, I should be behind my time at the shepherd's hut, when, frightened at a sheep which suddenly showed itself in the brushwood, the horse swerved round, and, before I could check him, had quitted the road, and was galloping at a rattling pace across country. It was a fortunate thing that the trees were not very thick at this spot, or the gig must have been dashed against one, and the results therefrom anything but agreeable. As it happened, the sward was nearly as level as a bowling-green, and the bark of the scattered gum trees so white, that the frightened animal naturally avoided them; and thus the only ill consequence resulting from the runaway was, that by the time I had got the horse again in hand, we were far away from the high road, with the probability of not finding it again.

This improbability was soon rendered an impossibility by the moon becoming again obscured. The heavens grew one

leaden shroud, each moment the darkness became more intense.

It was now necessary to abandon the gig, for it was unsafe longer to stick to that conveyance. I unbound my prisoner's arms, and made him unharness the mare, whilst I covered him with my pistol, an operation which his chain handcuffs rendered troublesome but not difficult. I then rebound his arms and unfastened his legs, and mounting the horse in spite of my bad leg, turned his head I knew not whither, making my captive march about a length before me, having first given him the comforting assurance that if he stopped or looked back I would put a bullet through his head.

After travelling for some two hours in this manner, I could not define whether in a circle or a straight line, to my great joy I perceived a light a little way ahead, and as we drew nearer, discovered that it shone from the window of a long rambling wooden house. The deep growl of dogs greeted our approach, and when, in obedience to my command, the bush-ranger knocked heavily at the closed door, a voice within saluted us in an angry tone with "Pass on, whoever ye are, ye get no rest here to-night. They pay high who make this a resting-place. Begone!"

I felt annoyed at this uncourteous reception, and was about to ride up to the door to hold a parley through the key-hole, when my companion, giving it a kick, exclaimed, in a voice quite free from the brogue, "Come, my good people, you won't have the heart to refuse the shelter of a roof and a crust of bread to two poor travellers lost in the bush."

He had hardly spoken when the door opened, and a rough voice answered, "Well, I don't mind if I do, if that's the time of day; I thought you was only loafers, perhaps."

When, however, his eyes rested on the feminine apparel and handcuffed wrists of the bushranger, he started in dismay; so to reassure him, I rode up and said, "I am an officer of police, this is my prisoner, we have lost our way in the darkness, and so can't reach Melbourne to-night; but I don't want to impose on your hospitality; if you will give us food and shelter, I will pay you well for both."

As I ceased speaking the man gave us a scrutinizing glance, and then said, "Fairly spoken, Mr. Policeman, I'm an honest

man myself, and I bid you welcome; drive that ragamuffin indoors while I take your horse round to the stables."

I was not sorry to dismount, as my leg was becoming troublesome. I resigned the animal to the master of the house, for he looked an honest fellow, and the nag was not worth stealing; besides, I could not keep an eye on it and my captive, whom I now followed into the house.

The first object that caught my eye on entering the kitchen was an American clock its hands pointed to eleven. It was the hour appointed for my nabbing "Dick the Devil" at the shepherd's hut, and a sigh escaped me as I thought of the thousand pounds reward, and the way it had slipped through my fingers. Regrets were, however, useless; the hut might be miles away, and even the direction in which it lay I could not as much as guess at. "I've a bird in the hand, at least," I thought, "I'll keep an eye on the old woman."

My cogitations were put an end to by the return of our host, accompanied by two young men of about twenty-five years of age respectively, whom he introduced as his sons. They were both strongly built young fellows, but would neither of them attain the almost herculean proportions of their father, who looked a perfect Samson in the ruddy firelight, which now enabled me to view his countenance and note the aspect of the apartment. The man had my first attention. He was attired in the ordinary costume of a shepherd or small farmer; he might have been forty-five years of age, for his short black hair was turning slightly grey, certainly he was not more; he was upwards of six feet in height, broad-chested and stoutly built in proportion; in fact, his well-set muscular figure showed great strength; his face was pleasing and open, save when in perfect repose, then only a kind of half-sneer, half-scowl rested on it, and seemed as though caused by some malformation of nature rather than the result of habit.

The room was plainly furnished, as is usual in the bush. A roughly hewn table, a chair, half a dozen three-legged stools, and the American clock before referred to, formed the greater portion of it. The fire consisted of a few logs of wood kindled on the hearth, while two iron bars laid across it, resting on a brick at each end, supported the tea-kettle and a saucepan or

two, from whence issued a savoury aroma strongly suggestive to an empty stomach. The walls around were decked with an atrocious print of "The Babes in the Wood," a rifle, fowling-piece, double-barrelled gun, and a brace of old flint pistols. As you may imagine, the weapons attracted my attention, the more so as they were all, save the pistols, capped and on half cock. Still, in such a lonely situation, so far away from another habitation, and the country around swarming with bushrangers, escaped convicts, and rascals of every description, there were but very slight grounds for suspicion in all this.

"Come, lads, let's have some tea. I've fed and watered your nag, sir, and now we must attend on you, but you aren't going to let that thief of the world sit at table with us, I've a cellar below will suit him better," said the farmer, contemptuously, as he glanced towards my strangely attired prisoner, who returned the favour with a fierce scowl. I readily availed myself of this offer, and found the cellar a secure place; that it was both dark and damp was not my fault. I unbound the prisoner, still, however, keeping the bracelets on, and pushed him in. Our host threw him some straw, and giving him some bread and beef, we left him to his own reflections.

We now turned our undivided attention to the supper, which, though perhaps wanting in quality, was ample as to quantity. A boiled leg of mutton was fished out of one saucepan, a huge mess of potatoes from another, the damper was taken from the hearth, and an immense jug of ale with a black bottle of whiskey put on the table.

Rendered hungry by my long drive, I did justice to the substantial viands before me, and over a glass of grog listened to the worthy shepherd's account of the death of his wife from typhus fever, of the marriage of his only daughter with a rural policeman; of the murrain in the cattle and the rot in his sheep; of the last great bush fire, and other like matters, until at last, getting drowsy, I proposed to go to bed.

It was time I did so, the fire had long since gone out, the clock pointed to two in the morning, and as I rose to depart, the remains of the candle sunk in its iron socket, and left us in darkness. "Here is a pretty go," said the shepherd, after a fruitless rummage in every nook and corner of the room.

"We have not another scrap of candle, were it to light us to pick up nuggets; you must go to bed in the dark."

"Heed not that, my man," said I, "the moon shines brightly, lead the way."

"Will you not leave your great-coat and arms here?" suggested the host.

"No, my friend, my pistols and I never part company," I answered, with a laugh, and wishing the young men good night, followed their father to my room.

This was, however, no easy matter. I had to grope my way after him along a dark passage, at the end of which he ushered me into an apartment where there was no other light than that given by the moon, which shone through a small window glazed with little panes of coarse glass. Here he bade me good night, and, with apologies for the poor accommodation, left me.

The apartment was small. In one corner stood a bed of that shape commonly called in the colonies a stretcher; this, with a coarse basinstand, a broken chair, and a ship looking-glass, made up the furniture. Like an old traveller, I turned to secure the door; without bolt or lock, it had only a small thumb latch.

Dismounting the wash ware, I piled the stand, together with the chair, against the door, in such a manner that no one could enter without making a noise sufficient to wake me. To make all sure, I felt in my pocket to see that the key of the cellar, wherein I had confined my prisoner, was there. It was all right. I then examined the charges in mine and the bushranger's revolvers, and placing both under my pillow, without undressing, threw myself on the bed, and weary and worn out by my night's adventures, prepared to sleep.

For a time a species of nervous wakefulness possessed me; the moaning of the passing wind, the flapping of a loose board on the roof above, the fitful shadows of a gigantic gum tree thrown by the moonlight on the damp and discoloured walls, and above all, the deep bay of dogs in the yard beneath my window, baffled my every endeavour to slumber; and when at length I was about to drop off, a whispering of human voices in the next room again put me on the *qui vive*. I could not help fancying that I was the subject of their con-



versation, and I could swear that I heard the voice of the prisoner joining in the discussion. Creeping from my bed I put my ear to the wall, and, thanks to the loose jointing of the boards, could hear what was spoken.

The villains, of whom the bushranger seemed the leader, were coolly discussing a method for my murder; I was to be shot in my bed. The moment I discovered these amiable intentions I rose up and reflected. I had my revolvers, there were twelve lives in the barrels, if neither of them missed a life; but might not these assassins have revolvers also? at all events, they were four to one.

My mind was made up—I would run. Then rose the thought—how?

The rascals were traversing the passage, my feeble barricade would not stay them a minute. I gave a glance around the room. I espied a rope in one corner, a long rope. It suggested an idea, I secured one end of it to a strong iron ring that happened providentially to be in the wall, then I noiselessly opened the casement, and dropped the other end out through the window, following it myself, but not with the intention of descending it at once.

My foot found a rest on one of the projecting logs of which the house was built, my left hand grasped the window-sill, above which half my head and the six barrels of my revolver were alone visible. I had yet to bid my hospitable entertainers farewell.

I had not long to wait. The moonlight presently showed me the handle of the door turn, the door itself open about an inch; I waited no longer, bang, bang, bang, went three barrels of my revolver, and exclaiming, "Good-bye, my friends, pray don't forget me," I began to descend the rope.

A shriek of pain and hoarse curses from above told me that I had not thrown away my powder. I congratulated myself on an escape, when turning to look below, I saw the red fiery eyes of an immense dog glaring up at me, his deep muzzle, broad chest, and greyish white coat of wiry hair showed him to be a bloodhound, and with a thrill of horror I saw that I must drop right at his feet.

I levelled my pistol at him, and tried to steady myself on the rope to take aim; my first shot missed him, the second

gave him only a slight wound that rendered him far more dangerous, when I felt the rope give way, and I fell some five or six feet almost into his very jaws.

The fierce brute was about to spring on me, at the same moment a clattering volley rang out from above, and half a dozen bullets hissed by my head and buried themselves with a dull thud in the earth. Though little intended for the purpose, that volley saved my life; every ball missed me, but one passed through the head of the bloodhound, who was now lying dead across my body. It was a providential escape, but I was not yet out of the wood, and there was no time to lose. I could hear muttered curses of disappointment and the ramming of new charges home, as those above saw me move. Throwing off the dead brute, whose weight nearly stifled me, I fired the last barrel of my revolver at the window, and with satisfaction saw the big shepherd clap his hand to his face, which in an instant became covered with blood, then springing to my feet, I ran for my life, I knew not whither!

Immediately, however, I was checked by a high fence. At any other time I should have found this an obstacle difficult to surmount, but now a love of life gave me strength and expertness; even my sore leg was unfelt, and in a minute I was at the summit. The sharp crack of a rifle rang out on the still night air, my wide-awake flew from my head, and I felt a scrape like that of a blunt razor across my scalp, but did not stay to ponder on that. Springing down on the off side, I again took to my heels, loading my revolver as I went and ramming a bullet home in each barrel.

In about five minutes' time I stopped to regain my breath, and, from behind a gum tree, looked back at the log house. It lay a little more than a quarter of a mile distant, clearly visible in the bright light of the moon, which now shone down from an unclouded heaven. The night was so still that even the spring of the grasshopper could be heard, and I listened with breathless anxiety for the sounds of pursuit.

Presently the deep fierce bay of dogs smote on my ear, mingled with shoutings. I saw three figures and two powerful hounds emerge from the shadow of the fence; they were urging the dogs on the trail.

Again I commenced my flight, but had not run many yards

when I caught my foot in a hole, and was brought to with a sprained ankle.

I ground my teeth in despair, and glanced around; the dogs were only a hundred yards or so in my rear, running neck and neck, their great tongues lolling out of their mouths, thus displaying their formidable fangs, their eyes flashing fire, too eager for my blood even to give tongue.

I looked wistfully around, a ray of hope dawned upon my soul; a yard from me stood a tall gum tree more bushy and thick with foliage than its neighbours. With great difficulty I clambered up its trunk, got amongst its densest fronds, and with my two revolvers before me prepared to sell my life as dearly as possible. I knew they must come within my range to see me, they could not use their rifle now, save at hazard, while from the dogs I was quite safe. Those brutes were now howling with baffled rage at the foot of the tree.

I did not notice them, my powder was for their masters.

Presently they drew near, not advancing boldly, for they knew I was armed, but dodging from tree to tree. I recognised the shepherd with his head tied up in a blood-stained bandage; the bushranger (now attired in male apparel), and one of the sons. The other, I supposed, I had shot, which was in fact the case.

At last the villains opened fire, but, thanks to the sheltering foliage of the tree, the balls flew by me harmlessly.

I returned the compliment whenever a head was shown from behind a trunk, but for some time with equal ill success.

At length a bullet from the bushranger passed through my leg, and half mad with rage and pain I resolved to repay the shot with interest.

I had not to wait long for a chance; he incautiously exposed his side whilst reloading, and I marked him with his own revolver and fired. I saw him clap his left hand to his side, and blood spout out from between his fingers. He then quitted his tree, and fearlessly walked up to the very trunk of the one in which I was concealed. His eyes met mine, I fired two shots at him and missed, the next instant his barrel covered me.

"Curse you," he muttered, "that shot of yours has won you

a thousand pounds. I am 'Dick the Devil,' but you shan't live to touch the money."

His finger was on the trigger, but ere he could pull it his brain reeled, death's hand was upon him, he fell at my feet a corpse.

At the same moment a rattling volley rang around me, I saw the shepherd and his son running for their lives, pursued by two of the Melbourne mounted police.

The fellows were captured, tried, condemned, and hanged. I pocketed the thousand pounds, less two hundred, with which I rewarded my brave preservers. Thus ended my first adventure with the bushrangers of Victoria.

## THE MISSING FINGERS.

“Old Jimmy Brooke and his troopers so tall  
Would have empty stomachs if 'twarn't for the wall.”

SUCH was a common chorus of the street boys of Melbourne in the year of grace 1852, and it became as highly popular as did the kind inquiry, “How's your poor feet?” in the good city of London some ten years later.

Now old Jimmy Brooke was myself, the troopers so tall were my subordinates, of whom twelve months after my arrival in the colony I had a goodly company of twenty, all stout, strongly built fellows of some six feet in height, well mounted, and each armed with a brace of revolvers and a cavalry sabre: but my readers will be naturally curious to know what the empty stomachs and the wall are about. Well, then, the meaning was this. In those days it was the custom to affix all notices offering rewards for the capture of criminals and escaped prisoners on the outer walls of the city gaol; and there we members of the detective force used daily, and often two or three times a day, to resort, to peruse the little square bills, and see if there was anything new.

Our regular pay was small,—in fact, despicably so; but then we could generally feather our nests well with blood-money, and such chances arose almost daily.

We used facetiously to term these placards “The Police Gazette,” and when beneath the royal arms and the V.R. £100 or upwards figured in thick black type as the reward for a capture, no little excitement pervaded our barracks, and bets were made, and odds given and taken, as to who would be the winner.

On such occasions I seldom troubled myself to give instructions to my subordinates, individual interest always sharpened their faculties, and each would secretly plot a plan for capture, and carry it out on his own hook, jealous of having to go shares with a comrade. You may imagine that over such a pack of man-hounds I had to keep a pretty tight hand, but I soon found one kind of punishment in all cases sufficient, and that was to restrict the offender for a time from tracking the high rewards, and to force him to look after those offenders for whom only ten or even twenty pounds were offered. This plan answered a double purpose, for, save as a punishment, my fellows would never have looked after this latter class at all; and had a five or ten pound prize fallen into their hands, they would most probably have let him go, hoping that temptation would before long drive him to commit a worse crime, and elicit a higher value on his head. "Why be content with an egg, when it will become a fowl?" was their motto.

This feeling I had a great difficulty in overcoming, but at length I did so by decreeing that every trooper who did not produce a small offender once a week should be restricted from following any higher game for the succeeding month. This had the desired effect. And now for my narrative.

It was a bright summer's morning in the September of 1852 that I strolled down Russell Street, and took a glance at the prison walls for any new placards that might have been posted since the preceding evening. My attention was almost immediately attracted by one that ran as follows :—

"V. R.

ONE HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD.

Whereas a prisoner named Rolf Schweig escaped last night from the city gaol, and killed a turnkey who endeavoured to stay him : the above reward is offered for his recapture, alive or dead. Description : height, five feet eleven inches ; face pale ; hair sandy and curly ; nose aquiline, a pimple on left side of same ; ears small, and bored for earrings ; teeth irregular ; body stout, broad-chested, and muscular ; hands small, and middle finger of left hand cut off at second joint ; age forty-five ; speaks with a slightly foreign accent."

The description was clear enough. "There's no mistaking the fellow if I once clap eyes on him," I thought to myself. Then arose the natural query, "Where was he gone to?"

While I walked up and down, buried in deep thought, I saw two or three of my fellows come down from the direction of Latrobe Street, and after hastily looking over the new placards, walk away rapidly towards the barracks. At half a glance I knew the conclusion they had arrived at, which was that the fugitive had taken to the bush. In half an hour they would be in the saddle and in pursuit.

This was certainly the most probable course that an escaped prisoner would adopt, and yet something seemed to whisper to me that they were on the wrong scent.

Before I decided upon a course, I determined to gain fuller information regarding the man and the manner of his escape, and with such intention I gained admittance within the walls, and asked to see the governor and the chaplain.

I did not, however, elicit much information from them. The prisoner had made his escape the evening before by stabbing the turnkey who brought him his supper, robbing him of his keys, and by their means gaining the yard, where he succeeded in scaling the wall, and, escaping two shots fired after him, was observed to run up Latrobe Street in the direction of the new Carlton Gardens.

Two or three incidents struck me as peculiar in this matter. Firstly, the turnkey was not only killed, but his body was covered with stabs in every part, and the throat was cut as well. Private vengeance has been at work here, thought I, and the prisoner delayed his escape to have a full surfeit. The poor man had been slain with his own pocket-knife, which I took possession of, as it might be useful to me. I learnt that he was a German, and could speak very little English. Prisoner and he had always appeared on very good terms. The second thing I noticed was that the prisoner must have had assistance in his escape, for a broken rope hung from the outside of the wall, and there were scratches from boots ascending the wall, which would not have been caused by a man slipping down a rope. I inquired as to the manners and habits of the prisoner, and the

crime for which he had been confined. I learnt, to my surprise, that his habits were reserved, quiet, and gentlemanly; his temperament even, but slightly inclined to melancholy; that he was a Protestant, and a great favourite of the chaplain, as he seemed very devout in his religious duties; and that he had been convicted of stabbing a German waiter in an hotel at Geelong, apparently without any provocation whatever. As the wound had been a slight one, though within an inch of the heart, the charge had been only "for wounding with intent," and the sentence three years' imprisonment, which term, with the exception of three months, had elapsed at the time of his escape.

The only other point told me worthy of note was that the prisoner always seemed strangely affected by the singing of the Evening Hymn in chapel, and would generally either tremble, shed tears, or exhibit some other signs of strong mental excitement during its performance.

There was very little to guide me in all this; in fact, it more confused my pre-arranged thoughts than otherwise, and on my way back to the barracks I kept asking myself the questions, "What made the fellow so terribly mutilate the turnkey? What made him take such fearful measures to escape, when in three months more he would have been released at the expiration of his sentence? How is it in both cases his victims were Germans? And why has the Evening Hymn such a strange effect on a man who appears lost to every other gentle emotion?"

In vain I strove to fathom the matter; the only conclusion that I could arrive at was either that the man was insane, or that there was some great mystery in the affair, which the amputated finger on the left hand might perchance afford a clue to. On my arrival at the barracks I learnt that five of the force were already in pursuit of the runaway. They had gone to seek him in the bush.

I took another view of the case, and without being able to assign any reasons for my suspicions, I felt sure that the fugitive would either lie in concealment somewhere in the city until the *furor* occasioned by his escape was over, or else secrete himself on board some vessel in the harbour, with the hope of escaping from the colony.



I lost no time in commencing the search. In half an hour I had a dozen private agents—men in whom I could trust—trying to hit off the scent through the city, whilst I and two or three more started for Sandridge, to search the shipping at the piers and in the bay.

While my men were scattered about on board the different vessels, I wandered down one of the flights of water-steps to question the boatmen, and as I was systematically pumping a weather-beaten old tar, I beheld a strange object lying amid the dark green sea-moss that coated the sides of the lower steps. I took it up, and a thrill of horror ran through my frame as I discovered it to be a human finger covered with clotted gore. I could see at half a glance it was the fore-finger of a man's left hand, and it had been cut off with a knife! I tried to track the drops of blood up the steps, but there were none save on the one where the finger had lain. I questioned every boatman; they had neither of them had a passenger, nor seen a man answering the description of the runaway. I could tell by their answers that they spoke the truth.

To make a long story short, I spent the whole day at Sandridge and on the bay. Every ship I boarded and closely searched. I sent trusty agents in the swiftest boats I could find to do the same with every vessel at Geelong and inside the Heads. I made inquiries, and found that no vessel had left the harbour since the hour of the prisoner's escape the preceding night; but when I returned to Melbourne in the evening, tired and weary with the day's labour, I had no more clue as to the whereabouts of the fugitive than when I set out in the morning.

My spies, who had been hunting about the city, came in, one by one, to give their reports. They were equally unsuccessful.

The police who had taken to the bush did not return. Were they, after all, right in their conclusions?

Days and weeks passed away, however, after this; and in spite of our utmost endeavours, which were further stimulated by a doubling of the reward, not the slightest clue could be discovered of the murderer. Had he been in the colony, we must have had him, for our vigilance never slept.

He was evidently gone far away, but how and where, none could tell.

I often gave a discontented glance at the finger picked up at Sandridge Pier, which was now preserved in spirits of wine, and I felt sure belonged to the fellow I wanted; and yet there were very slight reasons for such a suspicion: it was a finger that anybody might have owned—merely the forefinger of a man's left hand. Still three things were evident from its inspection, namely, that its owner had not lately done any manual work; that he had either not had the opportunity, or else had neglected to cut his nails; and thirdly, from two small abrasions of the skin, and a bit of mortar between the nails, that he had been clambering a wall or something of the sort.

I recollected also that the police report stated the middle finger of prisoner's left hand was missing, and I made up my mind, when I did fall in with my worthy friend, I should find his fore one gone also; though how he lost it, and by what fatality, I never expected to discover.

\* \* \* \* \*

We must now pass over a period of several months, and change the scene to Sydney.

I had been sent to that city on some official business relative to forged notes on one of the banks there, which necessitated my being absent from Melbourne for a lengthened time. During my stay I became acquainted with a gentlemanly Frenchman, who was living at the same hotel, and whose name was Jacques Loyal.

He was a good-looking, frank fellow, to whom one would naturally take a liking. He was very nearly six feet in height, somewhat delicate-looking, with aquiline features, jet-black curly hair, and well-pointed moustache; true, his teeth were not of the most regular species, and a pimple on the nose detracted from the appearance of what would otherwise have been a very handsome face; his figure was stout and muscular, but his left arm he carried in a sling, having, according to his own account, broken it in falling over some rocks at Manly Beach, about three weeks prior to my arrival.

We soon became fast friends, or rather, I should say, companions, for my duties gave me ample leisure; and the

Frenchman being an artist, with very little business, I found him ever ready for a walk, boating excursions, or billiards.

It was a fortnight after my arrival in Sydney, that Loyal and I took a boat, with the intention of sailing as far as the Heads.

The weather was superb in early autumn, the month being March, and as we glided swiftly down the harbour, I fancied that never had I beheld so glorious and fairy-like a scene as that which surrounded us.

On our right, the spires and domes of Sydney and Woolloomooloo, the dark green foliage of the trees in the Botanical Gardens, which seemed to throw out in clear relief the tapering spars, yards, and taut rigging of the stately guard-ship that lay close inshore, her long snake-like pennant slowly curling and twisting in the breeze, and the spirit-stirring strains of her magnificent band (for it was the officers' mess-hour) borne melodiously to our ears over the glassy bosom of the water, in which her colossal form was reflected as in a mirror. Close on her right frowned the guns of Macquarie Fort, a quarter of a mile to the rear of which, embosomed in trees, rose the walls and square tower of Government House, above which floated the royal standard of England.

On our left a different scene presented itself. The undulating wooded banks of North Shore, where the dark tea-tree shrub and dwarf eucalypti covered the shelving cliffs even to the water's edge, and handsome verandahed villas, standing amid their flower-gardens and bright green lawns, glittered in the sunlight like pearls set in emerald, while before and around them frowned the green-black foliage of the towering gum, the most mournful and funereal of trees.

In less time than I have taken to describe them all these scenes were left behind; Pinchgut Island and the Sow and Pigs (what names for such scenes of fairy-land!) were quickly passed—for the wind had begun to freshen,—and in less than two hours from leaving Circular Quay, the bold precipitous bluffs known as the Heads rose to our view, and beyond them the blue crested waves of the ocean—the boundless Pacific.

We took in sail, and for some minutes we gazed silently

upon the beauty of the scene, for there is nothing so conducive to a drowsy kind of reverie as the mere act of gazing upon the sea, and listening to its low monotonous murmur.

At length a certain feeling in the stomach suggestive of dinner made me break the silence with, "Well, Loyal, if you've had enough of this, let's put her about; we shall be nearly two hours running up the harbour, and 'tis already four o'clock.

The Frenchman started. I had evidently aroused him from deep and painful thought, for his cheeks were pale as death, and his eyes full of tears, but he aided me to put up the sail; and we were soon tacking across the harbour's mouth, so as to have fair wind up channel.

Sydney harbour is full of angles and windings, so much so that at six different periods between the Heads and the town you seem to be enclosed in a small land-locked bay, only finding an exit therefrom when your boat appears to touch the opposite shore.

It was in rounding one of these points that Loyal uttered a cry of alarm, and on looking round I saw a small steam-tug bearing right down upon us, and only about fifty yards distant. She was coming on under full steam, and we were directly crossing her course.

"Port helm!" I shouted to my companion; but he was so panic-stricken that he was perfectly helpless. I flew to the tiller, though too late to escape the collision. The last thing I remember was the captain of the tug shout, "Back her!" A terrific crash followed, and then a sensation of being pitched head over heels into space. A moment after I was struggling in the water, swallowing large mouthfuls, buffeting with the waves that buzzed in at my ears, and having the clear consciousness that I was going to the bottom, for I had no idea of swimming, and the shore was a good hundred yards distant.

Just as my eyes and nose were submerged, I heard a voice shout, "Lay your hand on my shoulder, but don't grapple me—there's a boat coming!"

I had sense enough left to follow this advice; and, instead of clutching my preserver, as many a drowning man would have done, I laid my right hand on his shoulder, and thus,

while he trod water, I was enabled to raise my mouth and chin above the stream, and in this position, to my unspeakable joy, I saw a small boat, propelled by a couple of sturdy oarsmen, rapidly nearing us.

"Keep up your pecker, my hearties!" shouted one of them, as he shipped his oar; and in another minute we were both dragged into the boat, and her head turned for Sydney.

Pretty drowned rats we looked, as we stepped out of the *Nancy Jane* on to the Circular Quay, and hastened to the nearest inn to warm ourselves with a nobbler; from thence driving to our hotel in a cab, and losing no time in changing our dripping garments for dry clothing.

Having completed my toilet, I knocked at Loyal's door to see if he was ready. A moment later he joined me on the landing.

"Well, old fellow," I said, "you saved my life, and I trust the day may come when I shall be able to show my gratitude in some other manner than by mere words."

Little did I fancy that an opportunity would soon occur. Little did I know the man who stood beside me.

"Where shall we dine to-day, McDonald?" asked Loyal, as we reached the hall. McDonald was my *nom de guerre*.

"Well," I replied, after a minute's reflection, "let it be the St. George's Restaurant, in George Street. I feel inclined to be extravagant to-day. A bottle of champagne will take the horrid taste of salt water out of my mouth."

"And yet you swallowed it as though you seemed to like it, *mon cher*," laughed Loyal; "nevertheless, champagne let it be."

We emerged into George Street as we conversed, and sauntered lazily on, gazing at the fashionable crowd and the glittering shops—for George Street is the Regent Street of Sydney—until we reached the corner of King Street, where we met George Rodway, the then Chief of Police at Sydney. I knew him well. He nodded to me in passing, and stared very hard at my companion.

After he had passed us about a dozen paces he stopped and called to me. I begged Loyal to excuse me a minute, and walked up to him.

"You are a clever fellow, Brooke," he exclaimed, laughingly, but in a low tone.

"How so?" I asked, not understanding him.

"How so? Come, that is good. Don't you fancy I'm up to your little game?" he answered, with a knowing wink.

"I'll be shot, Rodway, if I know to what game you allude. The bank matter is settled very satisfactorily; I have no further business here, and to-morrow I return to Melbourne."

"Oh, indeed!" said Rodway, in a tone of relief, though a curious smile rested on his lips; then, in a careless tone, he asked, "Who is your companion?"

"A Frenchman named Loyal," I replied. "We have been out boating, and were capsized; he saved me from drowning."

"Oh, indeed! then I'll not keep you longer from joining him, Mr. Brooke. I trust you will never be called upon to return his kindness by saving him from hanging!"

And without waiting for a reply, Rodway turned away, and quickly disappeared round the corner of Pitt Street, leaving me extremely puzzled, and totally at a loss to account for his concluding words.

"How is it that you know him? He's the head detective here, is he not?", asked Loyal, suspiciously, as I joined him.

"Yes," I said, carelessly, for I did not want my acquaintance to know that I was in the same profession; "I had to consult him the other day about a watch that was stolen. Reputation speaks of him as being a very clever fellow."

By this time we had arrived at St. George's Restaurant (why will these antipodean eating-houses choose foreign designations in lieu of the good old English name of eating-house?), and entering the dining-room, took our seats at one of the side tables that, through the open window, commanded a view of the street, which—the heat of the day being over, and the evening fine—was more thronged than usual, with a fashionable, well-dressed crowd. Several handsome equipages were dashing along, or drawn up before the doors of one or other of the gorgeous marts of feminine apparel, awaiting their occupants, who, perhaps, were at that moment more engrossed over the merits and demerits of a new bonnet than were their husbands, in the dull gloom of the Legislative Assembly, over some colonial

bill embracing mighty and important provisions for the reduction of thistles, or the abolition of "brickfielders."

Though I have called the crowd a fashionable one, it was not exclusively so. A sprinkling of French sailors and naval officers gave it somewhat the air of the Rue St. Antoine of Marseilles, while a still larger number of British Jack Tars, artillerymen, and marines, would recall to down-west Englishmen an idea of Union Street, Plymouth. Nor were there other elements of variety wanting: the cabbies, newspaper boys, fruit-sellers, and others, had the true brogue of the Emerald Isle; and the untanned leather complexions, twisted pig-tails, and remarkable costumes of a few passing Celestials, were calculated to present to an old Chinese merchant reminiscences of health-impairing, liver-destroying Hong Kong.

And well does the aspect of the street itself accord with the nationality of its promenaders; for as New Orleans presents the appearance of a French city, a German city, an American city, and an Indian town, all met together in orderly and decorous fraternization, so does Sydney resemble an English street, a French street, a Chinese street, and a Colonial street, with a dash of German, Irish, and native peculiarity in each; the houses whereof have become universally mutinous, and, consequently, been drafted into each other's ranks.

In support of my assertion, I recollect, seven years ago, in this very George Street, nine houses in succession, as follows:—Number one, a bank (architecture pure Italian); secondly, a French *café*; next, a German divan; then a Chinese merchant's, followed by a colonial wooden shanty; then an English draper's; then a *pension Suisse*; next, a Turkish bath; and lastly, an American rifle gallery and bowling saloon.

I have no longer time for descriptions, and will at once return to my personal adventures. Loyal and I did ample justice to the *cuisine* of the *restaurant*; and after satisfying the inner man, took our chairs through the window on to the balcony, so that whilst we discussed our wine and cigars, we could better enjoy the sweet western breeze, and observe the passers by in the street below.

We had not been here ten minutes, when Loyal, who was sitting listlessly, with his legs over the arm of his chair, suddenly started to his feet so impetuously that table, decanter, and glasses were upset, and exclaiming, "Cursed fate; 'tis he!" dashed in through the window, across the room, and out at the door, before I could recover from my surprise at the sudden excitability of my usually sedate and unimpassioned acquaintance.

When I did so, I determined to follow him, for I felt that strange presentiment of coming evil which seems sometimes to be a very instinct of our nature.

Hastily putting on my hat, I paid the bill, and reached the street in time to see Loyal turn the corner of Market Street towards the racecourse. I followed him, not with the intention of overtaking, but for the purpose of watching his movements.

I could see even now that a great change had come over him within the last few minutes. Instead of his usual quiet but haughty walk, his steps were long and uneven, and his right arm (his left was still in a sling) was swinging backwards and forwards, while his head kept jerking to and fro like that of a man suffering from severe nervous affection.

I could not distinguish the object of Loyal's pursuit, the street being still crowded. On following him round the next corner into Elizabeth Street, I distinguished, about fifteen yards ahead of him, a tall, muscular fellow, whose Crimean shirt, white moleskin trousers, with dandy silken sash, answering the purpose of belt, and felt hat, marked him as a digger.

He seemed quite unconscious of being followed. He never once looked round; but with his hands in his pocket, and a short black pipe in his mouth, walked rapidly on towards Bathurst Street. All at once he stopped, as if irresolutely, then turned off at right angles, and entered the racecourse, which, by-the-bye, now enjoys the more dignified appellation of Hyde Park.

Loyal increased his pace, entered the same gate, and followed still more closely, but keeping an even distance from the digger.

By this time it was getting dark, for in New South Wales,



as far north as Sydney, twilight is very short, so that as I kept some yards behind Loyal, I had little fear that he would recognize me, even if he looked back.

My curiosity was aroused to its highest pitch. Was the Frenchman, with his broken arm, going to attempt to give the burly digger a thrashing? I saw that hatred, and not friendship, instigated my friend's movements, and naturally enough imagined that it was caused by some old grievance, perhaps being cheated at cards, a foul stroke at billiards, a rivalry in love, or something of the sort.

I had not much time for conjecture. Loyal, walking on the grass as softly as a cat, was gradually nearing his adversary; his right hand was thrust within the breast of his coat. Had I not had a high opinion of the Frenchman's honour, I should have imagined that he was handling a weapon; but I knew him too well to have that suspicion, for how could I fancy that the man who had risked his life to save my own was a cowardly assassin? So I still kept at a discreet distance in the rear.

The digger at this moment had gained the turnstile leading into the main avenue, and pushing it open, passed through. Then Loyal sprang forward; one bound, and he was at the low hedge by the side of the stile. I saw him bend down; I noticed the glimmer of steel in his hand. I shouted to him, but he did not hear me; my voice was drowned in the sharp crack of a pistol, and the piercing shriek that followed.

"He has killed him!" I muttered to myself. I made no effort to secure the murderer. I stood rooted to the spot. I knew it was my duty to capture Loyal, though I felt I could not hand over to justice the man to whom I owed my life.

I had just resolved to retrace my steps towards the town, when I heard a cry and the sound of a scuffle, and, to my surprise, saw the Frenchman struggling in the grasp of three men, whose shining glazed shakos showed them to belong to the police force. In spite of his opponents, he was fighting like a madman; he had drawn his broken arm from its sling, and was using it with as much effect as his right; in fact, so desperate was his defence, that one of the policemen

was obliged to draw his staff and deliver him a head blow, that stretched him senseless on the grass.

At this juncture of affairs I joined the party, and to my astonishment recognized Rodway, the chief detective.

Upon seeing me he burst into a loud laugh. "Ah, Brooke!" he said; "your name ought to be Gull. I don't admire your choice of acquaintance; there are almost sufficient grounds for me to arrest you as an abettor in this affair; but as you've let such a piece of good fortune slip out of your hands into mine, I won't exceed my strict duty."

"It is a most remarkable case," I replied. "Loval is the last man I should have suspected of such a crime; but what you mean by the piece of good luck I've let slip, I can't imagine."

"Oh, can't you? perhaps a glance at this poor wounded arm and its continuations will solve the riddle!" and untwisting the bandage from Loval's left hand, at a glance I saw that two of the fingers were missing.

"Rolf Schweig!" I exclaimed, aghast at the discovery.

"Yes, Rolf Schweig," exclaimed Rodway, with a laugh. "Who would have imagined that hair dye, false moustache (the latter does cover the cut on the upper lip, though), and other trifles, would have deceived the keen eye of a Victorian chief detective? My dear fellow, I've known the man's identity for a week; but thinking that you were marking him down as your exclusive prey, professional etiquette prevented my interfering, until to-day from your lips I learnt that you were ignorant as to who the fellow was. Then I resolved to act at once. You were traced to the Restaurant, and afterwards followed hither; and now James Rodway will thank the Victorian Government for two hundred pounds reward."

"And the fellow he fired at—is he dead?"

"Not a bit of it; the ball passed through his shoulder. Can't you hear him groaning? His wound has been bound up, and they will carry him to the hospital; he will be about again in a fortnight."

\* \* \* \* \*

My story I must draw to a close. Loval—to designate him by his proper name, Rolf Schweig, was borne to the

police station, and soon recovered consciousness. He was taken before the magistrates, and remanded to Melbourne, so that the more serious charge, the murder of the gaoler, might be gone into first. Of this, as a matter of course, he was found guilty (the facts being indisputable), and sentenced to death. From circumstances elicited at the trial, the fact of his sanity was so doubtful that his sentence was commuted into incarceration for life in the Yarra Lunatic Asylum, where he lived three months, and died a confirmed and dangerous lunatic.

I visited him frequently there ; he seemed as sane as most men. On one of these occasions he told me his history, and his reasons for committing the crimes he had perpetrated and attempted ; and as the narrative was both strange and yet interesting, I will endeavour to narrate it to you. One fact he would never thoroughly disclose—how he managed to evade us so cleverly after escaping from the Melbourne Gaol, and to get scot-free into the sister colony.

## THE MADMAN'S TALE.

LITTLE did I dream that I should ever disclose the incidents of my eventful life to the ears of mortal man, but now that my last night has come\*—now that I hear the hammering of the carpenters on the terrible gibbet, and see its reflection cast by the moonlight on the walls of my prison cell, I feel that it will be a relief to ease my heart in some measure of the load of crime that lies heavy on it—to confess my sins to one human ear before the dark grave hides them and their perpetrator in its embrace for ever.

To begin, then. I am neither German nor French, for I was born in Drury Lane, London, in the year 18—.

My parents were dealers in old clothes, rags, bones—in fact, anything that came to hand. They were Germans; and doubtless it was from hearing them talk of the Fatherland so frequently in terms of pride and regret, that caused me in future years to be anxious to be considered a German.

My parents had only two children, myself and my sister, who was three years my senior. We were neither much looked after nor cared for, being allowed to spend our time as we pleased, and pick up whatever companions and play-fellows we chose. You may easily imagine that our position was a perilous one, with no good example before us; for our parents were frequently had up for receiving goods knowing them to have been stolen, obtaining money under false pretences, and other similar charges, whilst the juvenile

\* Schweig's sole delusion was "that he was in prison, and to be executed on the following morning at seven o'clock."

community of the immediate neighbourhood of Drury Lane and its blind courts and alleys was not very select.

I soon learnt to be a pickpocket, and by the time I was twelve years old was one of the most accomplished prigs in London.

My sister's fortunes were better. A kind clergyman, struck by her childish beauty when she was about twelve years of age, and finding her totally ignorant of every kind of religious and secular instruction, got her into his Sunday school, and at the end of three years his wife took her into his service as under housemaid. To this kind sister I was many a time indebted for being saved from want. When father and mother were in prison she would often send me all her scanty earnings, so that I might have bread to eat, and be saved from the temptation to steal. She even begged the worthy clergyman to take me into his employ as a stable boy, which he said he could not do, as he always kept his vacant situations for those who had been most regular in their attendance at his school.

Even the love of this good sister, however, and the money she so kindly sent me, were not enough to turn me from my evil courses. Her affection was not valued then, and the money went in tobacco, beer, and pitch and toss during the day, whilst my evenings were spent around the doors of the theatres, picking pockets whenever a chance offered.

On one of these occasions I was detected in the act. A tobacconist in Bow Street saw me insert my hand in a gentleman's pocket who was looking into his shop window. He rushed out in time to seize my hand just as I had abstracted a valuable silver snuff-box. In vain I kicked and struggled. He handed me over to a passing policeman, who took me to the station-house. Next morning I was taken, for the first time, into a police court. The evidence of the owner of the snuff-box and of the tobacconist did for me, and I had six months in the gaol.

There I was mixed up with criminals of the deepest villainy, for one of whom, a noted burglar, I contracted a great liking. I looked up to him as a kind of hero, and the consequence was that he patronized me in a lofty sort of way; and as his sentence of two years expired on the same day as

mine, he offered to give me a start in the world if I would stick to him. This I was proud to do ; we left gaol together, and took a miserable room in Paradise Row, leading out of Little Gray's Inn Lane.

Two days later he told me that he and some pals\* had arranged to crack a crib† at Hornsey, and that as I was small they would put me through an abstracted pane of glass in the library window, that I might open the front door for them. For this I was promised a flimsy,‡ and I readily agreed to do it.

The evening arrived, but I had a little job of my own on hand first, for I had resolved to burn the tobacconist's shop in Bow Street, the owner whereof had informed against me. Although at that time only about twelve years of age, I was a veritable little demon. London street boys have all the vices and cunning of men at a very early age, and I was certainly in advance of most of my companions. About seven o'clock in the evening I went to the tobacconist's, and it being in the month of November, and the night thick and dark, I was able to make my observations unperceived.

I noticed the shelf whereon the pipes and pipe-lights were laid, and then bought at a neighbouring shop one of those fire-lighters composed of little pieces of wood covered with tar and combustible matter, and returning to my victim's establishment, watched my opportunity, lit my instrument of vengeance under my cloak, and running into the shop, pushed it behind the row of match-boxes on the shelf, and then ran for my very life all the way home to Little Gray's Inn Lane, to meet my big pal the housebreaker.

I need not inflict upon you any account of my further adventures that night ; suffice it to say, that after being put through the window, I was caught before I could open the door to let in my mates. They escaped, but I was again sent to the station-house, and committed to take my trial on the two charges of burglary and arson, for the tobacconist—whose shop, as well as the two adjoining ones, were completely destroyed by fire—traced the crime home to me, and swore that he saw me running out of his shop ; and a police-

\* Mates.

† Break into a house.

‡ Bank note.

man on duty in the street deposed that he saw me go in stealthily and put something on the shelf, but that before he could take me in charge I had rushed out and run down the street like a mad thing. Even the shopkeeper from whom I had bought the fire-lighter was in court, and identified me as the purchaser. I was tried, found guilty on both charges, and condemned to penal servitude for ten years for the burning out of the tobacconist, and seven for housebreaking at Hornsey, making a cumulative sentence of seventeen years, which were to be spent in that dreaded colony of New South Wales.

After lying in prison for about three months, I, with fifty others, was conveyed to the London Docks in prison vans, and placed on board the *Vulture*, which, on the following day, in company with a store-ship named the *Mystery*, sailed for Australia.

After a seven months' voyage, during which we suffered the very torments of hell, being chained in the hold to each other in rows, sometimes for a week at a time, while the least murmur would bring the lash. Often, too, the hatch-way was battened down during the rough weather for days, and strong men fainted for want of air, or rendered darkness more hideous by the wildest and most horrible ravings and imprecations; some even died, and in more than one instance their dead bodies, still chained to their living companions, were left festering amongst us until nearly putrid, before their irons were knocked off, and their poor remains committed to the deep.

At length scurvy broke out, and then the visits of our persecutors became more frequent. Every night they came down to our noisome den to clear away the corpses, and seldom did they return empty-handed, for there was no surgeon on board, and we were left to die or live, as luck or Providence willed it.

At one time our rate of death was on an average of two a day; and during the night we could hear the dull splash! splash! as the poor fellows' bodies were thrown into the sea, without coffin or burial service.

It was a horrible time. Often we prayed for shipwreck, for death would have been a welcome termination to our

sufferings. At last, however, "Land ho!" was the welcome shout from the look-out, and twenty-four hours after we dropped anchor in the magnificent harbour of Sydney.

The next day we were landed and marched to the gaol, guarded by a company of light infantry with loaded muskets and fixed bayonets. Strange as it may appear, I never remember feeling so happy in my life as on that day, even though I was being ignominiously conducted to a prison. The air was so pure and beautiful, the sun shone so brightly, and all nature was so calm and peaceful, that after the fearful horrors of the past few months it seemed a veritable garden of Eden.

At this time it was the custom, instead of keeping the convicts close prisoners, to assign them to the officers of the garrison, but soon after my arrival the supply exceeded the demand, and for six months I continued an inmate of the Parramatta gaol, being employed during the day, with a hundred other convicts, in road-making, stone-breaking, &c.

During all this time I had received no tidings of my parents, whom I left in prison on a charge of purchasing a valuable watch for three pounds, well knowing it to have been stolen.

One morning when lying in my cell, thinking of my parents, and fancying how strange it would be if a parental government were to send them out to meet me in Australia, I heard steps in the corridor, the grind of the huge key in my prison cell, and when it opened—oh, heavens! I fancied I was mad, for my eyes rested on the face of my sister!

It was indeed her; the same quiet smile, the same soft melancholy light in the large hazel eyes, and her own soft, pleasing voice. After a moment's steady look I knew I had not been dreaming, and in the next we were clasped in each other's arms in a silent embrace. When the turnkey had retired, bolting the door behind him, I learnt that this angel of mercy had left her situation in England, and encountered all the dangers and discomforts of the long voyage (for those were not the days of ocean steamships and swift Black Ball Liners) for *my* sake—to soften *my* heart and hardships. She had even broken off an engagement with a young man who loved her fondly, and whose love she returned, and to



whom she was shortly to have been married, because her affection and sense of duty told her she might do good to a sinful and ungrateful brother at the other end of the world,—and that brother a convict, a thing of scorn, whom many sisters would have disowned and shrunk from.

When my good sister had told me all this, for the first time since my childhood tears trickled down my face, and my heart told me that I was not an alien from all mankind.

We were not allowed to be together for more than a quarter of an hour, but during that short interval I learnt that my parents were still in prison, where they were likely to remain for a couple of years more. I found also she had brought a most excellent character from the clergyman's family in which she had lived so long, and this I knew would get her a good place and high wages in Sydney. She told me that her plan was, if possible, to obtain a situation, get into favour with her employer, and induce him to get me assigned; when after a time, she fondly hoped, if I conducted myself well, a ticket-of-leave might be obtained, and I should be almost as well off as a free labourer. Ah, Mr. Brooke, I see by the shadow of the gallows on the wall, that I must condense the incidents of my tale, or I shall be unable to conclude it in this world. Well, then, Annie was successful; within a week of her arrival she obtained a situation as dairymaid in an officer's family who resided in the bush, but only six miles from Sydney; and in about a month after, a generally useful lad being wanted, she begged her master to take me. The consequence was that I became an assigned servant to Lieutenant Pasco of the Marines, and entered upon my duties forthwith.

A career of happiness now opened before me. The example of my sister engendered in my breast a wish to imitate her good qualities. My duties being over early, I could spend my evenings with her, when she would talk over the sins of my past life, and teach me to read, write, and sing, in all of which I was an apt pupil. My sister's favourite tune was the "Evening Hymn," and we used to sing it together every night before I started across the home paddock, towards the hut which I shared with the shepherd. I stayed with Lieutenant Pasco three years, and in that short time rose from the

equivocal situation of generally useful boy to the post of bailiff or agent. You may consider this an extraordinary thing for a convict so quickly to accomplish, but it is nevertheless true that I did it. Within that three years I had also educated myself to a great extent. I had picked up some German from a stockman on the station, who had belonged to a German band in London, and been transported for stabbing a comrade whilst in a state of half-drunken passion. I had acquired a knowledge of French, too, from a hut-keeper, who had been sent out for forgery, a thorough Parisian; this fellow had lived some years in London, and gained a handsome income by forging foreign passports for runaway debtors and others who were in a hurry to put the Channel between them and Britain; and I had, amongst other things, taught myself book-keeping, and believed I had formed myself fit for any kind of business.

Annie, my sister, had not been idle all this time. She, too, had struggled hard to improve herself, and had succeeded sufficiently to rise from the position of dairymaid to be a sort of nursery-governess and wardrobe-keeper. Lieutenant Pasco and his young and lovely wife were very kind to us, and the former had promised speedily to obtain for me a ticket of leave, when the terrible calamity happened which took from me one whom I loved more than my own life, and dedicated me her avenger.

I was then seventeen years of age, Annie just twenty, and a very lovely young woman. Her eyes were blue as the Australian sky, and her hair of that pale brown that gleams with golden lustre in every shade of light; her eyebrows well arched, the lashes long and silken, the little rows of teeth were white as strings of pearls, and the delicate purity of her skin was remarkable in such a climate as Sydney. In figure she was graceful, of the medium height, and neither thin nor approaching to fatness.

Annie was liked by every one, and, consequently, all were glad that she had so risen in favour with her mistress as to be promoted to the situation of trust I have named. When I say every one, I must, however, except the German stock-keeper. He had learnt to love Annie in his wild and impulsive way, and had sworn that she should be his. He saw in this rise in

her position another serious obstacle to be overcome. The difference was broad enough between the free dairymaid and the convict cattle-driver, but now the gulf was amazingly widened, and he began to feel less sure of his success. Annie had never received the German's advances with any degree of favour, though her natural kindness of heart and delicacy of feeling prevented her treating him rudely, and sending him speedily about his business, as she should have done. And perhaps this conduct, with a fellow who could not understand "No" to mean no, unless accompanied by abuse and passion, encouraged him to hope on. At last matters came to a crisis; the fellow wrote her a very long letter, containing a rambling confession of his devotion and passion, the offer of his hand and heart, and finishing with vague threats of putting an end to himself if she refused him. This letter was put into my hands by my sister, who begged me to return it to the writer, and tell him that he must never speak or write to her again.

I obeyed her behest, and undoubtedly spoke to the fellow a deal sharper than she wished me to do, and the consequence was that angry words arose, and he called me a "lag," where-upon I knocked him down and left the hut.

From that moment there was no good blood between us, at least on Itzig Schroter's side, and I was told that he had sworn that if Annie would not be his wife, she should not, at all events, wed anybody else.

For about three months things went on in their usual routine, till one afternoon in June my sister obtained leave to ride into Sydney, as she wished to deposit some of her salary in the new savings bank. I had arranged to accompany her, but at the last moment something turned up that required my immediate attention at the home station, and I was forced to stay behind.

Annie was not the girl to fear a lonely ride; Sydney was, as I have before said, only six miles from the station; and she was a first-rate horsewoman, so, as she intended taking a cup of tea with a friend in town ere her return, I promised to ride and meet her in the evening, and then hurried away.

Night came, and I mounted one of the horses and hastened to fulfil my promise. I had not been able to get over my work so quickly as I had anticipated, and was somewhat

after my time, but I rode fast to make up for it, and clearing the open space in front of the home station, speedily struck into the narrow bush track, which I had to traverse before I gained the broad road to Sydney. The night had grown very dark, considering that the moon was at its full, but the heavy masses of clouds so covered the heavens that its radiance was seldom visible; indeed, it was only just possible to see a couple of yards beyond my horse's head.

As I rode on, my mind dwelt on many things. Unpleasant recollections of the past mingled with pleasing thoughts of the present, and still brighter hopes of the future, for I had that day been told by my master that my ticket-of-leave had been signed, and would be in my possession the next day; while hopes were held out to me, at the same time, of a part remission of my sentence.

Once or twice my reverie was broken in upon by a distant sound resembling a scream, but I set it down as the chuckle of the laughing jackass, or the cry of the cuckoo. At length the sharp report of a pistol smote on my ear, and putting spurs to my horse, I galloped in the direction of the sound.

The beating of my heart told me that some dread discovery was near at hand; and suddenly my horse stopped and trembled violently. Finding it impossible to urge him on, I dismounted and endeavoured to discover the cause of his terror; when the moon suddenly glinted out from behind the cloud, and oh! horror of horrors!—I beheld the dead body of my poor sister lying at my feet. Her face was distorted and covered with bruises, her eyes glared wildly upwards at the cloud-covered sky, and a dark stream of blood welled slowly forth from a pistol wound in the throat. She was quite dead. I knelt by her side; a sudden and brilliant light from the full moon for a moment fell on her poor upturned eyes. Heavens! *in their widely expanded pupils I saw reflected the features of the German stock-keeper, Itzig Schroter.\**

From that moment I lost all consciousness, until one bright summer's morning, three days after my sister's murder, I awoke from a dreamy state of delirium, and all the incidents of that horrid night came vividly back to my mind;

\* The reader must remember that this is a madman's tale.

then everything became once more confused; again wild ideas hovered through my brain, and wild shapes flitted before my eyes. I was mad; and the succeeding six months were spent in the Lunatic Asylum. At last I was discharged as cured, and walked a comparatively free and sane man through the streets of Sydney; the surgeon of the asylum having given me, on the eve of my departure, my ticket-of-leave.

I soon learned that two men had been tried for the murder of my poor sister, and condemned to death, but had contrived to effect their escape the night before the day fixed for their execution, and that no traces had been gathered of them, but the general opinion was that they had wandered into the bush, and perished miserably there. No suspicions had rested on Itzig Schroter, who, I learned, was still in the service of Lieutenant Pasco.

With a mind deadened to every feeling of mercy, and a heart filled with no single desire on earth save to avenge my sister's death, I remained in town till evening, and then set out for the station. I knew that Schroter generally occupied a little hut to himself, which stood about a mile from the homestead. I had bought powder and shot at a gun-maker's in town, and stolen a pistol from the window while the shopkeeper's back was turned, and with grim satisfaction I loaded my weapon as I strode along the solitary bush-track.

An hour later, and I stood at the door of the stock-keeper's hut; it was on the latch, so I noiselessly opened it and entered.

By the moonlight that streamed in through the open door I saw the bulky form of the German lying at full length on his straw-covered stretcher. I cocked my pistol, and shook him by the shoulder. He immediately awoke, and as he did so his eyes rested on me, and on the glittering barrel of the pistol.

"Itzig Schroter, I have come to avenge my sister's murder," I said, sternly.

The wretched man half leaped from his bed, and with his eyes raised to mine, begged piteously for his life.

Then a thought struck me, and I said, "Tell me the names of your companions in villany, and where I may find them."

"If I do will you spare my life?"

"I do not promise, but attempt to deceive me, and you have no hope. Remember, I know much already."

Thus exhorted, Schroter confessed all. He told me that he was aided in his diabolical crime by two other fellow-convicts, also Germans, named Grässer and Hippus; that they had been tried in Sydney and found guilty, and that suspicion had never rested on him. He further informed me that both had escaped from the colony, but how or by what means, no one knew. I next made him give me a close description of the two ruffians, so that I might know them if ever I came across them; and after he had done this, to make more sure of mercy, he told me that Hippus was the murderer, and that he was only induced to join in the affair on being assured that robbery was the sole object of his mates.

"Liar and villain!" I cried; "I saw your countenance reflected in the eyes of my murdered sister; your mates only aided you in the vile plot that you yourself concocted, and thus do I avenge her."

I levelled my pistol as I spoke, and fired.

A sharp cry was followed by a hollow moan, and as the smoke cleared away I saw that Schroter had fallen across the stretcher. He was dead; a dark stream of blood flowed from a gap in his throat; I had shot him exactly in the same spot as he had shot my sister.

Whether from a return of my insanity, caused by the strong excitement under which I was labouring, I know not, but no sooner did I arrive at the conclusion that Schroter was dead, than I felt that I must commemorate my first act of retribution by severing the first finger of my left hand. I did so with a knife I found in the hut, bandaged up the stump, and fled into the bush.

Mr. Brooke, I have but a short time to finish my tale. I asked Mr. Brown, the Protestant chaplain, to come to me at seven o'clock; it only wants ten minutes to that hour. You will remember there still lived two others on whom I had sworn to wreak my vengeance, but as yet, in spite of my utmost efforts, I had obtained no clue to their whereabouts. Years passed away. I had been a wanderer in

every land,—everywhere watching and waiting for them who came not. At last the gold fever broke out in this colony, and after an absence of many years I again set foot in Australia, not with the intention of digging for the yellow dross, for I had accumulated enough to supply my few wants whilst life remained. No ; like the sleuth-hound, I scented blood. Instinct told me I should find Hippus and Grässer here, and it did not deceive me.

At an hotel in Geelong I encountered the former. His costume as a waiter, and the alterations which the hand of time had made in his features, did not cheat my memory. I stabbed him ; but my dagger, striking a copper coin in his waistcoat pocket, glanced off, and instead of piercing his heart merely inflicted a flesh wound. I was arrested, tried, condemned, and incarcerated, as you are aware, in the Melbourne Central Gaol.

There I had been about two years and a half when I discovered that a new turnkey had been appointed to our wing of the prison, and to my intense joy I recognized in him the German convict Grässer. You know how I served him, and how I escaped. He was my second victim. I fled I know not whither. At midnight I found myself sitting on the cold watery steps of Sandridge Pier. The silence and solemnity of the scene almost tempted me to commit suicide, but the memory that a third assassin lived, and that my vengeance was not yet complete, diverted the thought. Then a wild tumult in the brain banished all reasoning faculties, and I knew that my old madness was once more overpowering my senses ; under its impulse I drew from my pocket the clasp-knife of the murdered man, which I had pocketed after committing the crime, and coolly and resolutely severed the second finger of my left hand, bandaging up my hand as carefully and skilfully as though I had been an army surgeon.

What I did after this, and how I escaped from the colony, I know not ; and I believe all was done whilst in a state of lunacy. I have a dim memory of riding for days and nights over stony deserts and boundless tracts of sand,—of a wild longing for water, and at length of sinking exhausted beside a flowing river ; and my impression is that my senses did not return for some time after a party of overlanders

found me, and the city of Sydney was within view. They told me that they found me lying helpless beside a creek on the parched open plain, and that my burning thirst had weakened my brain and made me delirious: I fancied I knew the contrary; and in another hour we were at our journey's end.

This was about five months before I met you. During those months I won much at cards, and also earned money by painting, having become a fair artist during a somewhat lengthened stay in Germany, whither I had journeyed some years previously, fancying that both Hippus and Grässer might have returned to their native country.

Well, I have little more to add. The man who passed the window of the St. George's Restaurant, and whom I followed and fired at, was Hippus. I recognised him in an instant, although the jaunty digger costume had supplanted the dress of the waiter; and sorry am I that my wrist had lost its steadiness, or my poor sister should have been fully avenged. Still I am content; for though he has escaped me as well as the punishment awarded him by the law, he carries his crime in his heart, and one day fate will provide him a meet doom.

Mr. Brooke, you have heard my tale; the gallows is ready; it is past seven. I hear the chaplain's step on the stairs; you must go.

And rising, the lunatic motioned me from the room.

Poor Schweig! within a fortnight after his relating his tale he died, amid the most terrible ravings. He expired exactly at the hour of seven in the morning, the time which his phantasy had ever, day by day and hour by hour, depicted as the time fixed for his execution on the morrow.

His history made a great and lasting impression on me; it was the strangest I had met with during my professional career.



## PURSUING AND PURSUED.

By the opening of the year 1853, things had settled down pretty considerably in the good city of Melbourne, and, indeed, throughout the colony. A revolver stuck one side your belt, and a bowie knife the other, was not the afternoon promenade costume for Collins Street then, more than it is now. Handsome shops had already sprung up here and there, pavement was a thing not unknown in the principal streets, public gardens had begun to be laid out, church towers and spires were more plentiful, board and lodging could be had for money at all seasons, though two-roomed houses did bring their four and six pounds a week rent, on a general average ; many handsome suburban terraces, too, had arisen, as by magic ; Collingwood and Fitzroy were no longer towns under canvas, but had gradually risen to be represented by neat weather-board, ugly corrugated iron, and even here and there, brick and stone tenements ; railways, too, were in progress, and a handsome stone bridge had been thrown across the Yarra, at the foot of Swanston Street. Over this bridge, and, consequently, on the south side of the river, stood our barracks—a fact sufficiently attested to the beholder by the blue uniform, white facings, and shouldered carbine of the sentry, ever on duty before the large white gate leading into the barrack square.

Inside the outer gates, and, as well as I recollect, on the right-hand side thereof, were the sergeant-major's quarters, together with those of the lieutenant in charge, while opposite them stood the residence and office of the inspector. Of the square itself the extreme right was the officers' and commissioners' stables, and opposite were the stables for the

troop horses, in the rear whereof were pitched the tents for the troopers, while close by stood a long unsightly building, which was divided into a mess-room and dormitory for the cadets. These said cadets rejoiced in a silver-lace band around their caps, instead of the white cloth one that distinguished the troopers.

There are many people who think barrack life a sadly idle and indolent one. They may be right, but if so, ours was a great exception to the general rule, for at six o'clock every morning we were roused by sound of trumpet, and had to dress at once, take out our chargers, and ride them more than a mile to water. On our return we had to clean them down and give them a feed, by which time another trumpet flourish announced the morning meal, which consisted of good plain roast or boiled meat, bread, and tea without milk. At ten the cry was "boot and saddle," and we had to fall in on parade with our horses. Inspection over, which generally lasted half an hour, the order was given to mount, and we rode into the Government paddock—a large piece of open ground at the end of which flowed the Yarra-Yarra, forming its northern boundary, where we had a full two hours' drill; then we returned to barracks, cleaned down our chargers, furbished up our accoutrements, and went to dinner, which, as to the kind of prog, was breakfast over again, with the variation of hot meat for cold, and vegetables in lieu of bread. After this we had to parade for a second two hours' drill, this time on foot, which brought us up to within a few minutes of four o'clock, when we had to take the horses to water, clean down and feed them. Our day's labour was then concluded, save for such of us as were told off for guard, which was strictly kept, particularly over the stables, as at this time there were many bushrangers and other desperadoes in the colony, who were quite bold enough to make an attack on our quarters, and carry off our horses from under our very noses, had the least carelessness on our part given them the necessary encouragement. I was despatched about this time in all haste, with eight other troopers, to a distant station, which was a kind of connecting link between still more distant points, but where we should be a protection to the squatters, who, in these remote spots, were not only ex-

posed to the open ferocity of bushrangers, but also to the treacherous assaults of the aboriginal natives. The termination of our journey was a spot situate near the base of Mount Koronth, Marabool.

It was a lovely autumn morning in the month of February when we set out on our journey along the Gardiner's Creek Road, and passing through Prahran, then the tiniest of villages, gained the open bush beyond, and headed for Gardiner's Creek. Crossing this, and leaving the Yarra-Yarra river (which, by the by, in the aboriginal language signifies "flowing, flowing") on our left, we passed over a patch of rising, sandy land, which formed a belt between the river and a tract of sandy heath and shrub-covered ground beyond; in traversing which I noted several native cranberry bushes, together with many species of dwarf acacia and wattles. Arrived at the end of this sandy tract, we struck out in an easterly direction, crossed some clear running streams of water—all tributaries to the Yarra, whose banks were thickly covered with sombre trees, and dotted with innumerable wild flowers.

At last the sun set behind the distant mountain tops, and we prepared to camp for the night. We were about midway between Gardiner's and Babee Jim creeks, where the country was extremely rich, undulating, sparsely timbered, but thickly grassed, and about four miles from the southern bank of the river.

We accordingly hobbled our horses, lit a fire, made tea in our billies, baked some damper in the embers, and sat down to our supper with light hearts and keen appetites.

It will be as well here to introduce my readers to some of our company.

Next me, on my right, sat Bill Mathews—a stoutly made, muscular fellow of about twenty-eight; his hair was brown and lank, his face of a dull mercurial colour, perfectly beardless, with large grey eyes, one having a slight squint. Although not possessing the appearance, he was nevertheless a gentleman, his father, being a clergyman and schoolmaster in England. Poor Mathews had gone astray through a faulty home training; his father ambitious for a reputation for strict impartiality in his school, made a point of treating his own

son even more harshly, and punishing his boyish delinquencies more severely, than those of his other pupils. From this, his son, who was motherless, began to entertain the idea that his father disliked him, and seizing an opportunity, he had run away to sea, worked his way to Victoria as a cabin boy, and was now a trooper in the police.

The next man to him was George Smith, the son of a large coal and iron mine proprietor in the midland counties of England, who was worth his £30,000 a year, the owner of a palace, of thirty indoor servants, with twenty saddle and carriage horses in his stable. This young man had been brought up in the greatest luxury and comfort, but at twenty years of age he had fallen in love with a beautiful but penniless girl, and to prevent a *mésalliance*, his father had banished him to the other end of the world, not even seeing him ere he departed, nor making him any pecuniary allowance, lest on coming of age he should have the wherewithal to return to England and marry the girl in spite of him. The young man in question was slightly formed, and about five feet ten in height, dark, and good-looking, with curly brown hair, a well-pointed moustache and imperial, and dark flashing eyes; he was rather affected, and had an air of lassitude in all his movements, which was partly assumed and partly natural.

The third individual was a young Irish farmer, whose father, owing to an increase in rent and pressure of creditors, had been turned out of his homestead, and died in the union. The son had come out as a free emigrant along with his only sister. She was now a shop assistant in Melbourne, and he was earning half a guinea a day and his prog in the force.

Next him reclined a handsome but somewhat *blasé* man, of gentlemanly bearing, who was once a captain in a light infantry regiment, but who had been cashiered from the army for gambling, and striking a superior officer.

Then came a fellow who had been a whipper-in in England, and a stock-driver in New South Wales; he was the most brilliant rider I ever saw.

The sixth man was the most refined and highly educated of us all. Tall and slight, but muscular and well made, he

had been a fellow of Baliol College, Oxford; and later still, a rising author in London. Time and women had, however, brought his funds so low, that he had to come to the last refuge of the destitute—Victoria.

Beside him, again, was a man with red whiskers and moustache, who was the son of a leading physician in the West of England, who, with a good practice but large family, had only the means wherewith to give them all a good education, a Bible, and a blessing. This son had ever been wild and wayward; at twenty he had, in a drunken bout, accepted the Queen's shilling, and entered the army as a private, whence his relatives had to buy him out. Then he persuaded his father to pay his passage to Australia; where, after spending all his loose cash in debauchery and licentiousness at Sydney, he had worked his passage to Melbourne, and there been taken into the force, after successively failing in the aristocratic employments of selling oranges in the theatre, crying fish in the streets, and breaking in horses at the bazaar.

The last man of our little company was about forty years of age, tall and dark, with hair slightly changing to grey; he was an old hand from Van Diemen's Land, whither he had been transported for killing his man in a duel. He had served seven years of his time, and was remitted the remainder, owing to most exemplary good conduct, and a friendly warning he once gave the Government of a contemplated revolt amongst the convicts. It was owing to the high character given him by the gaol governor and the chaplain that he obtained admission into our ranks. He was now our leader.

Having thus described our little circle, it is time for me to resume my narrative. After partaking heartily of our meal, we sat around the fire smoking our short black pipes and spinning yarns, until the moon rose; when, wrapping ourselves in our blankets, and placing our saddles as pillows, we consigned ourselves to sleep.

I soon sunk into a profound slumber, perhaps lulled thereto by the lonely cry of the mopoke or native cuckoo, which only utters its low plaintive note at night; or by the soft murmur of the warm east wind amid the tall branches of the gum and pencil cedar trees, that were thinly scattered around our camp.

I might have slept some two or three hours, when I was suddenly roused from my slumbers by a rough hand shaking my arm, and another laid across my mouth.

"Hush! listen! what do you make out that to be?" whispered a voice in my ear which I recognised as belonging to Harry O'Neil, the duellist.

I raised my head from the saddle; but it was so dark that I could see nothing; the fire had burned down to a heap of red cinders, and only shed a dim light for a radius of about a yard; beyond all was dense blackness.

I listened, but the rustle of the wind was alone audible to my ears.

"What alarms you, O'Neil?" I asked, in a low voice; "I hear nothing."

"But I do; there again, surely you heard that?"

"Of course I did, 'tis the cry of the mopoke; you surely ain't frightened at a cuckoo?" I responded, scarcely able to refrain from laughing aloud, for the cry was so familiar that I could not imagine any one mistaking it.

"Not at a cuckoo, my friend. Don't you know the real from the sham, the dove from the hawk? That is no mopoke, 'tis the signal of the black fellows."

"The deuce it is!" I ejaculated, feeling for my revolver; "do you think they will attack us?"

"Not they; but they will steal our horses, that is what they are up to now."

"You mean, if you let them," I said.

"We shall find it a difficult matter to prevent them, mate," was the retort.

"These savages can see by night as well as by day, when I can't distinguish your head from your heels, although you are touching me. However, let's wake our comrades."

This was done in a minute, for they lay so close together with their feet turned towards the fire, that, like spokes in a wheel, you had only to describe a circle, and you would not miss one.

As silently as possible they were all aroused from their slumbers, and a council of war was hastily held.

"Throw some logs on the fire, let us see what we're about," said one; but all our wood was already burnt.

"Listen, mates, that we may learn in which direction our horses are," whispered another.

We did listen, but could not hear anything but the wind, and once more the cry of the false mopoke.

"Let's fire our revolvers; 'twill show the fellows how many we are, and frighten them away," said Bill Mathews.

"It will tell them exactly how many horses there are to steal, and not frighten them a bit, for the very act will show that we don't know where they are," said Smith.

"I have it!" I exclaimed, as an idea struck me. "Does any mate's horse know his whistle?"

Not one had taught his charger that branch of elementary education.

"Then mine does," I continued; "and I will show you a way to save our horses yet."

As I spoke, I gave a long shrill whistle, and within a couple of minutes after, the sound of hoof-strokes was audible, and presently my handsome black charger galloped up to the camp, as well as his hobbles would allow him.

"Well, you've got yours, Frank, but how the deuce shall we get ours?"

"Easily enough," said Smith; "Frank's horse came easterly, we have but to go in the same direction; for as horses always keep together at night, we shall necessarily find them."

"I have a better dodge than that, my boys," said I, as I carefully saddled my nag, and secured every strap and chain so that they should not jingle; "I'm going alone after the horses; my animal, if left to his own guidance, will naturally rejoin his fellows, who are, without doubt, under the same instinct, making their way towards us. If they are not surrounded by the black fellows, I will bring them, never fear, for they will all follow me when I wheel round. If, however, their return is cut off, a pistol shot or cooey will tell you where I am, and we shall have to obtain them by force."

"All right, old fellow, go ahead;" and with this parting greeting I mounted and rode forth into the darkness.

In spite of the readiness of my proposition, I now felt decidedly uncomfortable, as, with the reins lying on my horse's neck, so that he should follow his own course, every moment

took me further into the lone bush, and more distant from the dull red spot that marked the smouldering camp-fire. It was so dark that I could not see my charger's head before me, but I knew full well that the keener eye of a black fellow could discover and distinguish objects several yards distant from him on such a night, so that I should be perfectly at the mercy of their spears and boomerangs; while they would be as safe from my pistols as if they were in the clouds. These thoughts had scarcely occurred to me, when my horse gave a shrill neigh—a sure token of man or beast in close proximity; the next moment a shiver told me of the proximity of the blacks.

A touch of the spur reassured my steed, and bending forward, I rode on with my head nearly under his neck, in which position, my uniform being dark and my horse black, I trusted to escape observation.

Above the low murmur of the wind, I thought I could distinguish the muttered yabber yabber of the savages; and I was ignorant then, as, indeed, were most of us, of the general cowardice and harmlessness of these half-naked sons of the soil; and of the fact that larger bands of them than a round dozen or so, were rarely to be met with.

Still on I rode. I conjectured that I must already have left the camp a good half-mile in the rear, when the faint rattle of chains, and the neigh of a horse, which was cheerfully answered by the animal I rode, told me that we were close upon the missing animals. By the sound of their hoof-strokes I could tell that they were advancing towards me, and drawing in my steed, I waited until I conjectured they were close by, and then, wheeling him round campwards, knowing they would follow, commenced the return route.

We had not gone far, however (I still preserving my almost horizontal position in the saddle), when the quick jerking jabber of the blacks (this time distinct enough) again fell on my ear. I could distinguish the patter of human naked feet around me—how many I could not guess; and as for the use of my eyes, I could not even see my pistol-holsters. By the cries of the blacks, I conjectured that they had surrounded the horses in a circle, and were in the act of seizing upon them. It was plain they had not



discovered me yet, and what course to take in the emergency I had not the slightest conception.

Suddenly I felt a hand laid upon the neck of my horse, and then there was a sharp cry of surprise as it came in contact with the bridle. That cry was repeated in a still shriller tone; when sliding my hand along the rein, I laid hold of the fellow's wrist, and by sheer strength of arm, lifted him from the ground, and threw him across my horse in front of me; then firing a barrel of my revolver into the darkness, shouting, as I did so, "Cut it, you rascals; here are twenty of us; run, or we'll shoot every one of you."

My words had talismanic effect. I could hear the black fellows scampering away in every direction. One only of their number ventured to give me a parting salutation, which came in the shape of a stout wooden spear that whizzed by within an inch of my nose, with anything but a pleasing effect.

It did not confuse me so much as to make me let go my captive. In spite of all his struggles, I held him tightly; and when, a quarter of an hour later, I was seated by our non-replenished camp-fire, with our good horses (not one missing) close by us, and the black fellow in our midst, loud and boisterous was our merriment, and many were the queries of what we should do with our unexpected sable guest.

One or two proposed to hang him then and there, but it ended by his being kicked out of the camp.

We now composed ourselves again to sleep, but our slumbers were short; in a couple of hours or so morn broke, and there was a repetition of the billy and the damper, after which the cry was "Boot and saddle," and we resumed our march.

It was a glorious morning, and all nature looked calm and beautiful. Our route lay over a gently undulating country, well grassed and watered, dotted thinly, and in park-like clumps, with the graceful pencil cedar, mingled with dog-wood and native walnut trees; while the strongly scented wattle blossoms filled the air with fragrance, and the low rich notes of the thrush, the sweet warble of the magpie, and the boisterous cadence of the laughing jackass, reverberated through the still air.

Our destination was close at the foot of Mount Koronth, Marabool, which is a hill rather than a mountain, standing apart from the main range.

We halted for refreshment about mid-day, on the margin of the Babee Jim Creek, whose banks were then nearly carpeted with wild flowers of rich hues, but, with one or two rare exceptions, affording no perfume. Above them, here and there, cropped up picturesque rocks of bluestone.

Amongst these flowers I noticed the tints of the clematis and ranunculus, with the creamy petals of the dwarf banksia, or native honeysuckle.

Whilst camping here we enjoyed the luxury of a bath in the clear sparkling water of the creek ; and seeing some fine fish in the shallows, we got our swords and had the luck to spear some ; we boiled them in our billies, and a very savoury meal they made us.

We took our siesta in the shadow of the trees, for the day was very hot, and had a couple of hours' rest. The mosquitoes were too active to let us sleep. We again saddled our horses and resumed our march.

We reached our destination after five hours' quick travelling. It was at the base of the mountain near a small brook ; the banks were thickly covered with the tree fern. At the rear of the station was a perfect forest of these fern trees.

Glad were we that night when we had stabled and littered our horses, and sat down to supper.

It is time now to explain to my readers the object of our journey to this remote spot. I have already mentioned the general purpose of an out-station. This particular one had hitherto been occupied only by a mounted trooper and a foot constable ; but they could not be everywhere at once ; and the recent depredations of a band of bushrangers on the neighbouring stations, whose owners were living in daily danger of their lives, together with a stray murder occasionally by the blacks, made a stronger force at that spot a matter of urgent necessity.

We were in high spirits at the chance of active service, and yet for a whole fortnight after our arrival we never succeeded in effecting a single capture. This was disheartening

enough; but what exasperated us was the fact that the bushrangers avoided our presence, succeeded in levying black mail with as great success as before our arrival, stations were still attacked, and people bailed up, one squatter being stopped and robbed within a few hundred yards of us.

"Well, boys, this will never do!" said O'Neil, the duellist, in a tone of despair. "I'll tell you what—we must come the bushrangers ourselves, as far as togs go; I mean, we must nab the villains by cunning, if we can't capture them openly, and I'm going to set the example this very night."

O'Neil was as good as his word; but the only result was—that he got shot at by a stock-driver of a neighbouring run, who took him to be what he personated, and popped one ball through the nap of his hat, and another through his horse's ear; so O'Neil returned more chagrined and ill-tempered than he had set out.

In spite of this untoward opening of the game, the idea became popular amongst us, and after that evening, in ones and twos, many of us used to come the bush toilet; and billy-cock or cabbage-tree hats, blue or red serge shirts, mole-skin pants, and heavy riding-boots, with blankets rolled up and strapped in front of our saddles, so as to conceal the holster flaps; our revolvers stuck in our belts, and our faces as innocent of shaving as though Mappin's shilling razor were a thing unknown. We soon looked more veritable knights of the road than perhaps many *bonâ fide* bushrangers would have done.

We were unsuccessful, with the exception of Captain Cunningham, as we called him in commemoration of his former position. He had been, by his own account, singularly fortunate, having beaten off three ruffians who attacked him; and on another occasion shot one in the bush, who, not being mortally wounded, managed to get away, conceal himself, and could not be found.

These narratives of the captain excited us unlucky hands until we were nearly wild; and one night we got up a handicap of a fiver round, to be taken up by him who made the first capture, and brought his prisoner to the station.

It was the third evening after this that I was donning my bush attire, and in rummaging over my valise I discovered

an immense false beard—or rather, beard, moustache, and whiskers combined (one of those kinds that fasten over the ears with wire); the hair was red, and I recollected having bought it in Melbourne to attend a masquerade.

The idea came into my head that it would be good fun to wear it; so I clapped it on, completed my toilet, and made my way to the stables. Pretty fun my appearance caused amongst such of my mates as were at the station, but I was anxious to get away, for something whispered in my ear that an adventure awaited me; so, learning that the captain and Bill Mathews had ridden out, and the direction they had taken, I determined to strike into a contrary track, and giving my horse the spur, was soon out of sight of the station, and skirting the fern-tree wood that stood in its rear.

It was a lovely night. The moon was full, and the whole sky was studded with its myriad stars, seeming like a million diamonds sparkling from a shroud; amongst them, with brighter lustre than the rest, shone the five fixed stars that form the constellation of the "Southern Cross." The smallest star of the group I chose to guide my course by, and for a while rode on in silence, for the stillness of the night was conducive to thought.

At length my attention was attracted by a tiny spark of fire a little way in the bush on the left of me; it was just such as would be produced by a pipe, and I soon came to the conclusion that if it was a pipe there must be a smoker at the other end of it.

I at once took a pistol from my belt, cocked it, examined the caps, and rode towards the smoker.

It might be a mate; if so, we should know each other by the colour of the ribbon in our hats. But it might be a bushranger; then there was a fair field and no favour.

Such were my reflections as I neared the fellow, walking my horse, but having the reins well in hand, in case I should come upon a covey of them.

In the soft grass my charger's feet made little sound, so that I was close upon my worthy before he noted my approach. He was lying down with the rein of his horse passed over the arm which supported his head. His face I

could not see. He was a tall, strongly made fellow ; two revolvers and a bowie-knife ornamented his belt.

"Wake up, friend ! Who are you ? What brings you here ?" I shouted, when I was within a few yards of him.

The man started up, and as his astonished gaze fell on me the moon revealed his countenance. I recognised the features of Captain Cunningham. Such an absurd expression of terror I never before saw depicted on any face ; his teeth chattered, and his eyes seemed to start out of their sockets.

"There's the brave shooter of bushrangers," thought I ; so I refrained from disclosing myself as I had at first intended, and determined to frighten him still more, as a punishment for his bombast and cowardice.

"Answer me quickly, fellow, or I'll send a ball through your head." Still no answer came. The captain appeared petrified with fear.

"Come nearer and show your face. I've a notion you're one of them cursed traps at the station ; if you are, I'll shoot you first and roast you afterwards, as sure as my name's Ned Rowley, for I've sworn to kill every mother's son of 'em."

This threat, and the mention of the name of the most noted and savage bushranger of the day, completed the captain's confusion. He sprang to his feet, uttered a cry like that of a hunted wolf, and galloped away for dear life.

Bursting with suppressed laughter, I discharged a barrel of my revolver to increase his alarm, and started off in hot pursuit.

To give the captain his due, he rode well. We were both equally mounted. We were clear of the scrub in a minute, and for several miles right ahead lay a gentle undulating country, over which the hunt would become a race.

I had no wish to catch the runaway at once ; I felt much the same as a cat does with a mouse,—a vindictive pleasure in prolonging his sufferings to the greatest extent, so I kept every now and then popping off my pistols after him, taking care to aim pretty wide of the mark, and yet near enough for him to hear the hiss of the balls as they passed him.

In doing this I nearly put my foot into it. The captain had enough presence of mind to guess that I had only two

revolvers ; he must have counted my shots, for when I fired my last shot he drew in his horse, turned in the saddle, and fired six shots at me in rapid succession.

Luckily, the trembling of his hand caused the balls to fly wide of me. Seeing me clap my hand to my holster, as though for another pistol, he again wheeled round and resumed his flight.

I saw at once that the fugitive was leading for Allamannin Station, the property of Mr. West, doubtless with the intention of seeking refuge at the homestead, and I determined to get up with him before he gained that haven.

On, on we dashed. My black steed was covered with snowy foam-bells, but I had not touched him with the spur. In the clear moonlight I could see, by the heaving flanks and irregular stride of the captain's horse, that the pace was terribly telling upon him.

At this juncture Cunningham perceived directly before him a wide ditch,—one of those deep gullies that are cut through the soft sandy plain during the wet season by the turbulent streams running down from the ranges, which are often nine or ten feet in depth, and even more in width. The next moment the animal leaped short and fell into the gully.

Cunningham was deposited roughly on his back in the water ; the animal shook him off, and scrambled up the opposite bank, while its master staggered to his feet and confronted me.

"Make a movement to escape, and you die," I cried, covering him with my pistol.

An old proverb says in effect, that when at bay, and escape impossible, even cowards are brave. Captain Cunningham was an exception to the rule. Although he had a loaded weapon he did not dare to draw it, but threw himself upon his knees in the middle of the stream, and with tears begged piteously for his life.

"It's granted on one condition," I said, sternly. "Listen to me. I know you ; you are a trap in disguise ; your name is Albert Cunningham. My mates have sworn that not a trap shall live who meddles with our doings. We are six of us, there are nine of you ; the price of your life is that you

lead your companions into an ambush that I shall plan, when we can shoot them down at our ease."

"Agreed," exclaimed Cunningham, eagerly; "but the job is cheap at the price."

"What more do you require?" I asked.

"Five pounds a head for the men, and half the valuables they have on their persons, with admission amongst your company afterwards."

"And what should we do with a coward?" I asked, contemptuously. "I cannot trust you; I recant my offer; you must die."

"No!—no!—mercy! for God's sake, mercy!"

"Such mercy as you would show to your mates. A man who would betray his own companions might prove false to me. When I count thrice I fire. Once—"

I took aim; and then the awful shriek of agony, the curses, the prayers that rose from that gully were indeed terrific! How long I should have kept him in that state of terror I know not, for my heart was steeled against him, but the neigh of a horse caused me to look round, and to my surprise I saw Mathews, Smith, and O'Neil almost at my elbow.

"Don't apologize," said the latter, turning to me; "we have heard it all. You were so engrossed with your joke that you did not hear our gallop over the grass. Fortunately for you, I saw you in your false whiskers before you left the station, or we should have shot you down as a regular bush-ranger; and the ribbon-badge not on your cap either." Then riding to the edge of the gully, and revealing himself to the astounded captain, he continued, in a tone of haughty irony, "Mr. Cunningham, you have been taught a lesson. We cannot have cowards, leave alone traitors, in our force. I must request that you do not put in an appearance at the station again. Come, gentlemen," and we turned our horses' heads homewards.

Captain Cunningham we never saw nor heard of more, but his horse was safe in the stable before our arrival.

## A STICKING-UP-AND-SHOOTING-DOWN ADVENTURE.

It was about a week after Shrove Tuesday, in the year 1853, —I really forget in what month, but its near proximity to the day named is imprinted on my memory, from the miserable failure we troopers of the V. P. made in our attempt to concoct a dish of pancakes for dinner out of the very limited means of flour, sugar, lime-juice, and wild ducks' eggs, with the lid of a billy for a frying-pan.

Never shall I forget our captain, O'Neil's, look of dismay as he dished one of the whitey-brown leather-looking concerns with his ramrod, and attempted to masticate a portion. Suffice it to say, that the taste resembled sodden leather fried in lemon juice, with a remote flavour of stewed tripe; none of us could eat it, and Mathews' large kangaroo-hound alone benefited by the efforts of our chef-de-cuisine.

To return to my tale.

It was evening, and the weather very chilly. I was alone in the log hut which formed our out-station at the base of Mount Koronth; all my confrères were on duty, hunting for those it seemed they would never find, the rascally bush-rangers. I had built a jolly good fire, and while I enjoyed its genial warmth and cheering blaze, I amused myself by polishing up my accoutrements, and cleaning my revolvers, alternately smoking and whistling for mere want of thought.

Suddenly, above the murmur of the wind amid the fern branches, and the lone cry of the wild fowl from the neighbouring swamp, I thought I could distinguish the gallop of a horse in the distance. My suspicions soon changed into cer-



tainty; it was the dull thud of a horse's hoof-strokes on the grass, and there was no doubt whatever but that the rider was urging it at a terrible pace towards the station.

I knew it could be none of our men, they would never ride their horses to stable in that blown and heated manner; so, buttoning up my uniform, and seizing my shako, I was about going to the door to see what I could make of it, but before I could open it, the rider, whoever he might be, had gained the station, and was hammering away with a riding whip against the door right lustily, while at the same time a terrified voice cried, "Open! open! for heaven's sake, open!"

I was not long in obeying that urgent behest, and great was my surprise at beholding a young girl standing on the threshold; her head was uncovered, and her long golden hair streamed over her shoulders and fell in rich tresses even below her waist.

In one hand she grasped tightly her little silver-headed riding whip; in the other she held the reins of a large bay stock-horse, whose foam-flecked sides and quivering nostrils told plainly of the speed at which he had been ridden. I was too scared for a minute, at the sight of this unexpected and beautiful apparition, to find words wherewith to address her, but I slipped the rein of her horse through the ring of the door-post, and motioned to her to go in and warm herself by the fire, whither in another instant I followed her.

If my ideas, regarding the beauty of my young lady visitor, were in any way confused upon my first beholding her beneath the pale moonlight, they became fully settled when, upon re-entering the house, the light of the huge fire, and the flickering flame of the lamp, fully revealed the almost heavenly beauty of her countenance and the graceful outline of her statuesque form. I now recognised her as the only daughter and heiress of Mr. George Martin, the owner of Cambromatta Station, and the richest squatter for a circle of fifty miles around.

I had seen Gertrude Martin once before; she had been pointed out to me at a kangaroo hunt by O'Neil of ours, and I had gazed with surprise and almost awe at this lovely Southern amazon as, by her father's side, she leapt her blood-horse over every obstacle with a firm seat in the saddle, and as light a hand on the reins as a very Nimrod.

Miss Martin must have been about eighteen years of age, but she was tall, and her figure perfectly moulded; the sweeping outline of limb, the ivory throat, sloping shoulders, swelling bust and taper waist, were worthy of a very Venus de' Medici; while her dazzling complexion, snowy brow, bright laughing blue eyes fringed with the longest of golden lashes, her arched brows; and above all, the arch dimpled little chin, and the richness of her glossy hair that flowed like a cloud of golden glory around her, composed a host of charms which, had they been transferrable to canvas, instead of blooming unseen amidst the wilds of Australia, would have immortalized their possessor.

Her features at present, however, bore an expression of excitement and impatience; she was very pale; there were scratches on her face and hands; she wore no riding-habif, but a rich evening silk dress, which was torn and splashed with mud; still, whatever was the occasion of this disordered attire and wild night ride, there was no sign of terror in her countenance, but on the contrary, her eyes, usually so soft and dove-like, now flashed with anger and indignation; and her voice, generally so musical and soft, was firm and haughty as she said, "I dare say my appearance astonishes you, sir; but my father's station, Cambromatta, is stuck up by bush-rangers. They are threatening my parents, and maltreating the servants with impunity; at the risk of my life, I escaped through my bed-room window, made my way to the stables, saddled a horse, and have ridden at a gallop all the way here. Can you aid us? for not only property, but what is far more precious, life is in danger."

"How many fellows are there, madam?" I asked.

"Six," was the reply.

"And how many men have you at the station?"

"Oh! only half a dozen, but they've all run away; and my father is tied down in his chair; whilst my brother, unhappily, is down in Melbourne."

"Then I will away instantly," I replied. "You stay here, Miss Martin, it's rather a rough place for a lady, but there's a good fire, and before I start I'll take your nag round to the stable."

"You are not going alone?" she asked in astonishment,

seeing me examining my weapons and preparing for departure.

"I'm sorry to say I must; my mates are all out patrolling, and may not return for hours; but don't fear, I've no doubt but that I can tackle these fellows,—at all events, I'll try."

"I will return with you, I can guide you by the shortest way," said the young lady, rising.

"No, no, Miss Martin, that will never do," I rejoined, "You have already ridden nine miles, the return journey would completely knock you up. You must rest here until things are again quiet at the station, and they can send for you; besides, there is danger in your returning now—danger that there is no need for you incurring."

"It is not a daughter's duty to shrink from sharing a danger in which her parents are involved; nor will I allow you, a stranger, to incur that peril for me and mine which I have not the spirit to meet also."

"But, Miss Martin, I'm a rough trooper, and those things are in my ordinary line of business. Your parents, too, are safe from the peculiar dangers that—pardon my plain speaking—would surround one so young and so beautiful as yourself, were you to fall into the power of these savages, who, by this time, are doubtless half mad with liquor."

The fair girl remained silent for a minute, with her eyes fixed on the floor, then raising them, she said, firmly, "In spite of all you say, I feel that I ought to return, and so I will; therefore, further arguments are wasted. Are you ready?"

"Quite," I said. For during this colloquy I had not been idle, but had loaded my revolver, buckled on my sword, and written on a piece of paper the following words, "Nine p.m.; just leaving for Cambromatta station, which is stuck up by six bushrangers. I am alone, so lose no time in sending succour, which may be most welcome."

(Signed) "JAMES BROOKE."

This I affixed to the table with a pin, and fetching a good horseman's cloak, once more turned to my visitor and said, "If you *will* return, Miss Martin, this will protect you from the cold night air; I'm going to saddle my horse, and in five minutes we shall be on the road."

I was even better than my word, for ere three minutes had elapsed, my black charger was at the door of the hut, the pistols transferred to the holsters, and after assisting the young lady to mount, I leapt into the saddle, and we started at a quick pace for Cambromatta.

I calculated upon our reaching the home-station about ten—for my companion's horse was somewhat distressed by its long gallop, and would not keep pace with my fresh steed. I was not in heart sorry for this, for I could not regard the present adventure in any other light than as a most desperate one, and the longer we were on the road the greater was the chance that some of my mates would come to the rescue before it was too late.

For the first five miles of our journey neither spoke a word, and no sound was heard save the low, plaintive note of the mopoke or Australian cuckoo, answered by the still more mournful cry of the wildfowl from the low, swampy ground on our right; while from the clear blue sky above, unflecked by a single cloud, the pale full moon shed a radiance as clear and far softer than that of day over the mellow Australian landscape and on the face of the lovely girl who rode by my side.

At last the white chimneys of the station were visible some two miles ahead; the sight of them aroused me from the half-dreamy reverie to which I had given way, and recalled me to the matter-of-fact world of which I was still a member.

"Miss Martin, how are these bushrangers disposed? Are they all within the house do you think?" I asked.

"No, four are inside and two are keeping guard—one under the verandah in front, and the other in the courtyard, at the back."

"And you think these are all?"

"I do, and what is more, I know exactly where they are placed; the man in the courtyard I had some difficulty in avoiding, and just as I was fairly off, he discovered and fired his pistol after me; one ball tore the sleeve of my dress, but the others went very wide of the mark."

"Really, Miss Martin, you are a perfect heroine," I could not help exclaiming; "but, upon my word, I wish you were

fifty miles away now. Why will you insist upon thrusting yourself into danger?"

"For the reasons I have given you before," she said, smiling; "but, see, I am not so defenceless as you fancy; I pillaged this from your armoury whilst you were saddling your horse, and can now take care of myself." And she drew from under her cloak one of our regulation revolvers, duly capped and loaded.

"I hope you won't shoot yourself instead of a bushranger; but as you are determined to be a veritable trooper, you must obey my orders as your senior officer,—will you?"

"Yes, as long as you don't tell me to run away."

"You faithfully promise?"

"I do."

"Well, then, I must tell you that prudence and discretion are the better part of valour, and as my army is small, I must not allow my men to expose themselves to useless danger. Watch my every look and motion, and don't fire before I give the word."

"Very well, captain," was the roguish rejoinder.

"Well, then, that's arranged. Now, where are we?"

"Yonder's the station, amid that clump of trees, just a quarter of a mile distant."

"Then we must ride more under the shadow of the ferns; keep directly behind me, and walk your horse as noiselessly as possible."

How I did at that moment long for a cloud to pass the moon, but there was not the slightest trace of one in the whole dome of heaven. I glanced back over the wide plain we had traversed, but not a single horseman was visible; our chances of succour were few indeed, so I nerved myself to meet the danger as best I could. And now the chimneys and roofs of the home-station were close by—I could hear the neigh of horses, and dreaded lest one of ours should answer them, but luckily they did not. Thanks to the sheltering shadows of the tree fern, which grew nearly up to the house, our approach could not be detected, and the long lank grass over which we rode prevented the horses' hoof-strokes from being audible. At length I saw the end of the fern-grove, and that it extended to within ten yards of the post and rail

fence at the back of the station ; but I saw another sight that caused me more uneasiness, which was the bulky form of an armed man pacing up and down just at the extremity of the grove ; his cabbage-tree hat slouched over his eyes, his long, shaggy black beard flowing far down over his scarlet shirt, and his broad belt adorned with a bowie knife and a revolver.

I saw at a glance that this fellow could not be avoided, we could not gain the station without his perceiving us ; while, on the other hand, an open attack could not be contemplated, as the report of a pistol would bring the whole band on us.

My companion was too far in the rear to see him, and not wishing that she should, I rode back a few yards and met her. "We must leave our horses here and proceed on foot," I said in a whisper ; and dismounting, I aided her to alight, and then fastened both our steeds to the stem of a fern tree.

"Now, then," I continued, "you must stay here for about five minutes, whilst I reconnoitre ahead and see that the coast is clear. I shall not be long."

She looked at me suspiciously, but nodded assent.

"Don't move an inch until my return," I said ; and walking away from her until I got a little distance in front, I crept on the ground, snake-like, amid the grass, towards the unconscious bushranger, with my drawn sword in my hand.

It was a deed I shrank from, it looked so very like murder ; but I knew the act I meditated was necessary and justifiable, which reflection consoled me. This snake-like motion was a very slow and unpleasant mode of progression, but it was a successful one. Once only I made a noise, which was caused by my spur coming in contact with a stone. The sentry heard it and glanced suspiciously in my direction, but perceiving nothing, muttered in a rough tone, "Only a 'possum, as I live ; I'm getting as skeered as a cat since I shot the trap on the Balbal Plains ; a drop of brandy will banish these fears."

As he spoke he drew a spirit-flask from his pocket, and turning his back to me, raised it to his lips. I was now only five or six yards from him, and availing myself of this favour-

able circumstance, sprang to my feet, and before he could finish his draught of brandy my sword hissed through the air, and so true was the stroke that the man's head was severed from his body, and rolled for more than a yard along the ground, while the trunk, with spirit-flask still clutched in its hand, fell prone to the earth.

I moved these ghastly objects out of sight, and then returned to Miss Martin, whom I found somewhat terrified at my long absence.

I did not tell her what had occurred, but with a few whispered words of assurance told her to follow me, for that there was no sentry at the back now.

We walked boldly on until we gained the post-and-rail fence which enclosed the yard at the back ; here I again reconnoitred, and finding the yard empty, and no lights in the windows of the house, we went on, but creeping very cautiously and keeping under the shadow of the fence, for discovery now would be fatal.

When we gained the door we listened breathlessly, and heard bursts of laughter and loud voices from within : "Your health, old gentleman, and yours too, Mother Martin, and many thanks for your hearty welcome. I trust you may always have such honest and jovial boys as us to eat your cold meat and drink your wine."

This speech was followed by uproarious applause, and then another shouted, "Let's unbind the governor and make him dance a hornpipe on the table."

"Agreed ! good ! capital !" and for a moment the jingle of glasses and the mingled volley of shouts of laughter and imprecations were tremendous.

Amid this din we entered the house, and my companion—now my guide—led me through two or three rooms, until we reached one which was only divided from that occupied by the revellers by a thin partition, in which was a little square of glass, and through this we could plainly see what was passing in the adjoining apartment.

A stranger sight than that I witnessed I never before beheld, nor happily such a one since. The room in which the bushrangers feasted was furnished with carpets, lounges, ottomans, and rich lace curtains, and the many articles of

vertu scattered around presented a strange and ludicrous contrast to the odd assemblage it contained. The table was spread with every variety of food and liquor, while empty and broken bottles and glasses strewed the floor. On the velvet-seated chairs and elegantly carved couches sat or reclined, in every attitude of ease and disregard for appearance, rough and ferocious-looking men, with tangled, un-combed hair and beards, and mahogany-tinted complexions, dressed in the rough bush costume, consisting either of cabbage-tree hats, coloured shirts, cord pants, with long boots reaching above the knee; or broad felt hats, red or blue jumpers, and moleskin continuations: most of them had their brawny throats bare, and wore silk scarfs around their waists, with revolvers and knives.

The leader of them sat at the head of the table on the edge of an ottoman, with his muddy boots over the back of an arm-chair, and the sleeves of his scarlet jumper rolled up to his elbows. I recognised at once that prince of bush-rangers, Bob the Thunderer, a fellow possessed of as much strength and brute courage as a tiger, but, if possible, with less mercy.

At that time he was as much known and feared as Morgan has more recently been. Yet Morgan did show mercy in one or two instances; but I never heard of Bob the Thunderer being guilty of such an act,—at least, I mean to those who might prove dangerous in any way hereafter to him.

Many a trooper had Bob sent to the shades; in fact, it was his common boast that he should never feel content until he had shot one for every barrel of his revolver. I knew that he had already killed five, and I could not help conjecturing whether I was destined to make up the complement.

But to return. These worthies were smoking most zealously, the short black pipes being rarely removed from their mouths, unless to spit about the carpet or to drain another deep draught of wine. One had a quart basin before him; another a huge Venetian glass goblet; the third preferred a decanter by itself; whilst the fourth seemed bent upon trying every vessel capable of holding a liquid that came within his reach.

These fellows were not the sole occupants of the room.



The station-owner and his wife were there, and seated at the same table, for bushrangers are fastidious in their notions: they had strapped their host and hostess down in separate chairs, and placed them in that position to preside at the festive board.

Mr. Martin looked anything but pleased at the speedy disappearance of the treasures of his cellar; his stiff grey hair almost stood erect like the "quills upon the fretful porcupine," and his jolly round face was purple red with bottled-up passion. The old lady looked angry and nervous, but tried to smile and take things easy, as she fancied that course to be the best policy under the circumstances. The two maidservants were the most terrified of the group; they were seated on chairs placed back to back; a thick rope encircled their waists, and another their wrists, their arms being passed backwards between the top and middle bars, and thus brought together. In this manner they were united almost as thoroughly as the Siamese twins. It was evident they were suffering from extreme terror; they were trembling violently, though neither dared speak.

It did not take us one quarter as long to notice every incident of this scene as it has taken me to describe. We had only a glance around ere the speaker who had proposed a hornpipe drew his knife, severed Mr. Martin's bonds, and another having cleared a space in the centre of the table, the old gentleman was hoisted up, passed safely over the bottles and glasses, and told to begin his dance.

I could tell by the hard breathing of my companion that she felt deeply this indignity offered to her father, but I had no wish to open an attack before such a step was compulsory, as every minute's delay gave a greater chance of my comrades arriving to share the danger. This I intimated to Miss Martin, who nodded approval.

Events soon hastened a *dénouement*. The worthy squatter, who had at first been too angry to comply and too alarmed to refuse to dance, at length became more heated to harness, and getting too near the edge of the table, it capsized, and in company with wines, spirits, prog, and crockery, Mr. Martin found the floor.

What a crash that was! what a ruddy lake poured over

the carpet ! what cries from the women and curses from the men ! The voice of Bob the Thunderer soon quelled all the other noises : " Stash that row, yer fools ! Hold yer tongues, yer she-cats, or I'll give you somethink to holler for.—And you, ye tarnation old ass, I'll have a drop of yer blood for every leak of spirit yer've spilt.—Out with your knives, my boys, and prick his tough hide for him ; he's clean spoilt our feast ! " And as he spoke, Bob, with one kick, launched the old man nearly half across the room.

Almost simultaneously with this act, and just as I was about to take the initiative, my companion brushed by me, pulled her revolver from under her cloak, and without pausing a moment to take aim, fired through the little window.

I saw Bob the Thunderer put his hand on his left shoulder, and howl like a wounded bear. I thought he was not dangerously wounded. His mates sprang to their feet and drew their weapons, so I fired hastily at one, and seeing they were about to send a volley haphazard against the partition, I dragged my companion to the ground.

I was right in my conjecture. They fired their revolvers ; the bullets tore through the lath and plaster wall, and whistled above our heads.

" Stay here, I command you ; do not move hand or foot," I said sternly to the beautiful girl at my side, for I was resolved that she should not get under fire if I could help it ; and perceiving the handle of the door, I determined on a ruse, and walked boldly into the adjoining department, exclaiming in an authoritative voice, " Give up your weapons, or you are all dead men. I have ordered my troopers to fire upon you if resistance is shown."

It was worth a good deal to watch the bushrangers' countenances at that moment ; my fearless bearing had the desired effect. They never doubted the truth of my assertion, but they evinced no disposition to lay down their weapons.

" Where the devil are your men, young cock of the walk ? " asked one.

" Within a few yards of you ; their pistols cover you whilst I speak." I knew that bravado alone must carry my point now.

"And if we do yield," returned another, "will you insure us our lives?"

"Fools! will yer believe the lying trap?" cried Bob the Thunderer, with a frightful oath. "'Tis the bullet or the halter, and I choose the first, so here goes." He raised his revolver as he spoke, but ere he could draw the trigger there came another shot through the little window, and throwing up his arms, Bob the Thunderer gave a piercing shriek, and fell on the floor a corpse! The bullet had penetrated his brain.

"There, my lads," I cried, taking advantage of this demonstration; "you see the only one whose crimes left him no hope of mercy has met his fate. Now are the rest of you going to surrender, or must I give my troopers the signal to fire?"

"Shoot them, policeman, shoot them. The rogues deserve burning. Look at my wine, and the way they've treated me," exclaimed the old squatter from a corner.

"No, no; don't make our house such a scene of bloodshed. Take them away," said his wife, who, pale and trembling, was still bound in her chair.

The servants only increased their screams.

"Mr. Martin, my orders will not allow me to have them shot if they surrender.—Madam, they have had their desserts already, though no doubt the next of which they partake will have less wine and sweetmeats to flavour it.—Now, gentlemen, deliver up your weapons."

"Well, hang it, I suppose we can't do any other, Mr. Peeler. I don't want to be shot down, so here's my barker," cried a muscular fellow, handing me his revolver with reluctance.

No doubt his example would have been followed by the others, but just as I extended my hand to receive this tribute of submission, a loud voice exclaimed,—

"What to —— are you about in here, surrendering to a single bobby and a gal? Out on you!" and the door being burst open by a kick, a bearded rascal appeared in view, holding in one hand a Colt's, and with the other dragging in Gertrude Martin by the hair of her head.

The game I saw was up in a moment. I tried to draw my

pistol, but ere I could do this I was felled to the earth by a blow from one of the bushrangers, and in a twinkling bound hand and foot. Gertrude was lying at a little distance from me, in the same helpless condition.

What next we should encounter I knew not, though I pretty well guessed that my doom would be death, while a fate more terrible might hang over the brave and lovely girl whose love for her parents had strengthened her to encounter such perils as she had done that night. I could hear her sobs: those sounds were not wrung from her by the cords that cut her delicate arms and ankles,—her heart bled for the sufferings of those whom she loved more than her own life.

Much as I longed, I was unable to help or sympathize with her. Lying on my back helpless as an infant, I was constrained to listen to the narrative of the bushranger whose entrance at so inopportune a moment had spoilt my plot, and brought us to such a miserable strait.

This ruffian had been on guard under the verandah in front of the station. Having no tobacco in his pouch, he had run round to beg some from his mate, who was posted as sentinel in the rear. Unable to find him, he had hallooed and cooeied, but this being of no avail, he had in the clear moonlight tracked his footprints, and discovered his dead body in the bushes. This alarmed him; he saw it was the work of a trooper, as none else would carry swords. The whinny of one of our horses attracted his attention, and aided him to solve the mystery. He quickly found them, saw that they were only two, then noticed our footprints, and plainly perceived that one was a woman's. He had then tracked them back to the station, entered by the back door, which he left open; and made his appearance just in time to undeceive his mates and turn the fortunes of the day completely against us.

Long and boisterous was the laughter of the rangers as Red Tommy (as he was called) narrated his yarn. Immediately he ceased, dark and lowering brows were bent upon us, and Red Tommy shouted, "What shall we do with them? Blood for blood, I say. Let's hang 'em both."

"Hang the trap by all means if you like, but the gal's mine. I'll make her Mrs. Peter Dargan," cried another.

"Dash it, no; that's not fair. She's no more yours nor ours, Peter. We'll cast lots for her,—she is worthy of one of us. A brave girl like that deserves to be a bushranger's wife. The bobby I vote burying alive."

"Burying or hanging is too good for the likes of him," grumbled a third. "I've a better plan than either of you, lads. Let's hang him by the heels to yon lamp-crook, and take flying shots at him from the other end of the room. Whoever, in two rounds, sends a ball through his head nearest the right eye shall have the gal. What do you say, mates?"

"Good, good. Bravo for Big Mike!" they cried.

The resolution was carried *nem. con.* With a thrill of horror that I can hardly describe I glanced up at the lofty ceiling. There, sure enough, was the hook, which was evidently hung for the purpose one day of sustaining a candelabrum. Little did the man who placed it there imagine what a burden it was this night destined to bear! I tried to think that the bushrangers were jesting, but another look at their ferocious countenances told me how vain was my hope. I turned towards my companion, who was pale as marble, and her eyes filled with tears. I was going to whisper a few words of encouragement, when the harsh voice of one of the rangers turned the current of my thoughts.

"A rope! a rope! Where the d—— are we to get a rope?"

"Dash it, I know. I saw one in the kitchen long and strong enough to hang every trap in the colony."

"Hurrah! Bring it here, mate. Let's get this thing over, and fix who's to have the gal, then we'll hunt up some more drink."

"Ah! ah! We'll drink to the trap's long journey, and that he may hire us good quarters in the next world by the time we join him," said Red Tommy.

"Trap, how do you feel yerself?—Miss Martin, how do yer do at all at all?" asked Big Mike, squirting some tobacco juice on my face.

"Wretch! hold your tongue. If I was free of these cords I would thrash the whole lot of ye," I cried; and managing

to give Master Mike a kick on the shins, made him howl lustily.

He looked fiercely at me, and handled his revolver as though to put an end to me there and then. In a voice hoarse as a raven's he shouted to his mates, who by this time had found the rope and brought it into the room, "Reeve a noose there; this fellow's neck is itching for his collar. Here, Tommy, a chair on the table; now another on the top of that; see, now you can reach the hook. That's right, my hearty, make it safe.—And, Mike, have you finished his hempen collar? Confound it, I forgot; he's to be hung by his heels. Look alive, mates!"

They did look alive. In another minute my feet were secured to the rope, and the signal given to haul me up. "Pull with a will, my hearties!" screamed Mike, dancing and capering round the room in wild glee, amid the threats and entreaties of the station-owner, and the supplications of Gertrude and her mother. I was hauled up into mid-air; the next moment I was swinging like a pendulum, equidistant between floor and ceiling.

"That's right, my boys; let him swing; 'twill require a better shot to win the gal. Are your pistols loaded? Boys, I'm first shot. Carroty Tom, stop by him to set him swinging fresh just as we are ready to fire.—And you, my fine fellow, say your prayers if you know any, for by jabbers you're no better than a dead 'possum."

How shall I describe the agonized feelings of that moment? Pray I could not; the horror of my position made me forget everything. I felt a rough hand give me a push; I felt myself swinging to and fro; then I heard a wild scream, followed by the report of a pistol, and a tingling as though a piece of red-hot wire were held against my ear. Next I heard Big Mike's rough voice ejaculate, "A miss, by George! Harry, it's your turn now, and may bad luck wait on you."

Again the sharp click of a pistol-lock, another hearty shove from the hand of Red Tommy, once more the sharp report of a revolver, but this time, to my surprise, followed by a howl like that of a wounded wolf.

A strange hope fluttered within my breast. I tried to

turn my head round, but could not. Bang! bang!—more shots—another howl—a wild cheer—the crashing of glass and wood, and Big Mike's hoarse voice shouting, "The traps, by G—! Make yourselves scarce, mates. The back door for your lives."

A moment later I was cut down by O'Neil, who laughingly exclaimed, "By Jove, James, 'tis clear you were never born to be drowned. 'Tis lucky they preferred your heels to your neck, or you'd have been a gone coon by this time, anyhow."

"O'Neil, I owe my life to your prompt assistance; but give me a pistol quickly; I owe that villain, Big Mike, a shot, and I would not that any one else should kill him."

Without waiting a reply, I took the weapon from O'Neil's belt, and was making for the back of the house, when two troopers entered the room, guarding a couple of the bush-rangers, who were bound hand and leg.

"Where are the rest?" I eagerly demanded.

"The big fellow they call Mike has slipped it, but Mathews and Smith are after him, and as their horses are better than his, they will come up with him, no doubt. A man with red hair is shot dead in the courtyard, and there's another with a ball through his head lying in yon corner, just breathing his last."

I glanced round and saw the fellow; I knew it was Dargan, whose account on earth a bullet from O'Neil's revolver had settled, just as he was about to take his shot at me. By his side knelt Gertrude, holding to his lips a glass of water. At that sight of heavenly forgiveness and Christian charity my heart thawed; the savage longing for Big Mike's blood abated. I felt content to leave his pursuit to Smith and Mathews, and returned to congratulate Mr. and Mrs. Martin on the turn affairs had taken.

The old gentleman shook my hand warmly, and the worthy matron told me that I should ever be a welcome visitor at Cambromatta.

Meanwhile the others had removed the dead men from the house, and deposited them in an outhouse for the station hands to bury.

We very soon afterwards took our leave.

Miss Martin was the last to whom I said farewell, and the parting was as though we had been very old friends. Lest my readers may indulge themselves with the idea that something more came of it, and that a future tale will narrate the elopement of the young lady with a penniless trooper, I will at once inform them that in three months, after the adventure just narrated, Gertrude Martin was married to a wealthy and middle-aged squatter, whose runs joined those of her father at Cambromatta.

Big Mike escaped with whole bones, much to my sorrow. The two captured rangers were sentenced to penal servitude for life.



# BURIED ALIVE.

## AN ADVENTURE AT FOREST CREEK.

ONE of the most general sources of dissatisfaction and murmuring on the Victorian gold-fields, in the year 1852, was the method by which the Government collected the gold revenue. Following the example of the Legislative wiseacres at Sydney, immediately upon the first discoveries of the precious metal at Ballarat, regulations were issued requiring all miners to procure a monthly licence to dig for gold, and to pay thirty shillings for the same. This regulation was all very well in theory; the question was, how to render it available to practise. It was plainly no easy matter to enforce this tax among a migratory population, living in tents, scattered throughout a wild and wide tract of country.

The mode adopted was to send out armed bands of police, who, swooping down suddenly on gully or flat, spread themselves over it and levied "black-mail," *vi et armis*, by demanding of every one his licence. These posses of police were always supported by a few mounted troopers, to cut off such worthies as might put faith in the alternative of putting in leg bail, and showing a clean pair of heels; for all who could not produce their licence were captured, and marched off, frequently many miles, to the nearest magistrate, where, after more or less detention, they were either fined five pounds or sentenced to a month's imprisonment. It will readily be conceived that such a system led to great discontent and irritation, and I must say that such feelings were but natural; and the general dissatisfaction was increased by the manner of collecting the licence fee, for instead of the collector's

calling upon the tax-payer, the tax-payer had to hunt up the collector. The digger was compelled to walk from his own gully to the commissioner's camp, which was frequently several miles distant; after which he had often to wait hour after hour under a broiling sun, while a crowd of others, who had arrived before him, were paying their thirty shillings or weighing out their ounce of gold.

I believe that greater facilities were subsequently offered for the payment of this fee, though it must have been after I quitted the force; anyhow, the mode of enforcing it continued the same for a long period, and I have hundreds of times heard the diggers complaining loudly and unceasingly of such a harsh and un-English measure. "First you tax our labour," said they, "and then you collect your tax at the point of the bayonet." The hatred to the system was universal, disputes were of daily occurrence, and collisions between the police and the diggers often took place, whereof spilt blood and cracked pates were frequently the result.

At some of the gold-fields a curious plan was hit upon for evading these inquisitorial visits. Directly a party of police was perceived in the distance, the diggers raised a cry of "Joe! Joe!" The cry was taken up, and presently the whole length of the gully rang with the shout, "Joe! Joe! Joe!" and of course, with more speed than dignity, the unlicensed portion of the community made tracks for the bush.

Sometimes, however, the police were too quick for this manœuvre, or else a view of a stronger body than usual of mounted troopers shook their reliance in their own pedal extremities; and in this case, as a *dernier ressort*, those diggers who had lost or never obtained a licence would descend their shafts and holes, and if any of the force happened to pass by and peer down into the depths profound, he would be greeted with the polite invitation to "walk down and make himself at home;" a kindness, however, which he took care not to avail himself of, for the tone of the invite too much resembled that "of the spider to the fly;" and had he done so, the chances were a thousand to one that he would have regretted his precipitancy, had he indeed escaped to regret it at all.

But to commence my tale. I have indulged my readers

with this long preamble in order that they may the better understand the state of affairs at the Forest Creek Gold-field, at the period when, in company with two other troopers, named Matthews and Crawday, I was ordered to leave Mount Koronoth Station, and attach myself to one bordering on those gold-fields. Matters were just about reaching a crisis, a general riot was anticipated daily, and we were all in the highest possible spirits at the prospects of scrimmage and adventure that presented themselves.

As we rode along, the laugh and jest were freely bandied round, and our very horses seemed to share our gaiety and light-heartedness. It was magnificent weather, the glorious sun shone down from an unclouded sky of steel-grey hue, which, in Australia, takes the place of the azure blue of Southern Europe. As we increased the distance between ourselves and the little out-station we had that morning quitted, the dense scrub gave way to the open bush, and for many hours we rode through a tract of country perhaps unsurpassed in loveliness by any portion of the inhabited globe. The stately gum trees (*eucalypti*) with their white trunks, the shea oak with its gracefully drooping foliage, the golden perfumed blossoms of the mimosa, with the richly wooded mountain range in the background, united to form a picture too magnificent to describe. The ground was fairly carpeted with wild flowers, the sarsaparilla blossoms creeping everywhere. Along our track sparkled the murmuring waters of a pretty streamlet, reflecting as in a mirror the gorgeous tints which the last rays of the setting sun at length flung over the surrounding scene; while the air rang with the cawing of the myriad parrots and cockatoos, of every hue and colour, who made the lone bush resound with their discordant notes, while their restless movements and gay plumage gave life and piquancy to the scene. Occasionally, too, the lonely plaintive cry of the curlew would ring out on the perfumed air, answered by the jocund "Ha! ha! ha!" of the laughing jackass; while now and then, with a suppressed hiss and a rustle of the dry grass and parting bushes, a snake would wriggle out of the way of our horses' hoofs, and then, with vibrating head and dull glistening eyes, glare at us as we passed. In the distance, too, as night advanced, the long melancholy wolf-like howl

of the dingoe or native dog, and the sharp cry of the wild cat and 'possum awakened the echoes of hill and gully.

At a distance of about forty-five miles from our destination we came to a halt, and pitched our camp for the night. Our beds were made of the mimosa, which possesses a perfume like the hawthorn. The softest looking branches were selected, cut down, and flung upon the ground, which, with our saddles for pillows, formed beds that to our weary limbs appeared soft and luxurious as one of feathers would do to the *blasé* man about town.

Early the following morning we resumed our march, and by noon reached our destination.

We found a dozen or so of the force already quartered at the station, and at once obtained an interview with the superintendent, who received us most courteously, and pointed out the nature of the duties that we should have to perform. We had arrived just at the opportune moment to enjoy the anticipated fun, for the very next day we were, in company with a party of foot constables who were quartered not far from us, to effect a regular raid on Forest Creek, and "stick up" all unlicensed diggers.

Not a single theme was started that night that did not bear reference to the events of the morrow, and amid the furbishing up of accoutrements, the grinding of sabres, the cleaning of firearms, &c., many were the odds given and taken as to whether the diggers would show fight—whether there would be a regular scrimmage, or only black looks and muttered curses as formerly.

The next morning was a magnificent one, and by nine o'clock we were mounted and *en route* to the field of anticipated battle, which was barely three miles distant. On our way we were joined by the company of foot police, twenty-five in number, and we immediately divided into two parties, in order to approach the gold-field from different directions. A quarter of an hour later we were close to the scene of operations, and a stirring one it presented. The hundreds of tents and shanties scattered over the valleys, the little stream winding through its midst, and the groups of busy diggers scattered around, was a pleasant sight to one who for so many months had been rustivating at a lone out-station; and more particu-

larly to one who, like myself, had never seen the diggings before.

We had not much time, however, for a quiet enjoyment of the picture, for no sooner were our snow-white shakos perceived in the distance, than pick, spade, and cradle were abandoned, and the roar of voices—to which the confusion of Babel must have been a comparative silence, for every one seemed talking at once—arose from the flat below.

This excitement increased, if such a thing were possible, when the crowd saw our other party advancing from an opposite direction. Cries of "Joey! Joey! Joey!" echoed from all sides, followed by curses, shouts, and ribaldry. Stump orators sprang on inverted beer-barrels, and with waving arms and stentorian lungs harangued their mates. To increase the confusion dogs howled, women screamed, and babies squalled in unison.

All this time we advanced upon the crowd slowly but steadily, for we were not allowed to outstrip the foot constables, and as we drew nearer I could hear one herculean fellow, who surmounted a barrel of colossal dimensions, shouting, "Yes, mates, that's what I say—I'm for fighting, I am. Send the darned traps back with a tight good lacing. Ah! do better than that—dowse 'em in the creek; pitch 'em into the holes and cover them up; kick 'em, cuff 'em, warm the ears of 'em! never say die. Never cry funky, my hearties!" And at each pause the speaker would wipe the perspiration from his face with the sleeve of his shirt, while he waved his other arm in the air like the sail of a windmill.

"True, true—listen to Jemmy Small!" cried some; "Hurrah for Jim the smith!" halloed others; but one wiry old fellow, edging himself out of the crowd, exclaimed, with a chuckle, "Ay, Jim's the mon to talk sinse, but for all that, thim as has got a licence will be great fewls to put their fet in a scrape for them as hasn't."

Many seemed to be of this worthy's way of thinking, for as we drew nearer some twenty or more detached themselves from the mob and walked quietly away.

"Halt!" cried the superintendent, when we had got to within about a dozen paces of the crowd; and riding fearlessly forward, he said, in his hearty, good-tempered way, "Now,

then, my boys, we've come to have a glance at your licences, so you may as well fork them out with a good will. You know we are only doing an unpleasant duty that we can't shirk, so you won't blame us; and I don't think any of you will be so foolish as to oppose the Government."

There arose a few cheers in answer to this, but just as many hisses on the opposition side; and Jim, the smith, to restore his somewhat waning popularity, shouted, "All right, captain, here's my licence;" and pulling a rotten egg from his pocket, he shied it with so correct an aim that it smashed to atoms upon the superintendent's nasal extremity, which for the moment seemed as though it had just emerged from a pot of honey.

This was too much for the superintendent; the hot Celtic blood was up in a minute, and drawing his sword and giving his horse the spur, he dashed at his assailant on the barrel, the crowd making way for his powerful charger with a wonderful degree of politeness.

The stump orator howled with terror, and tried to escape. In vain were his efforts,—before he could leap from the barrel amongst the crowd, the flat of the "captain's" sword descended with such force upon the bent back of Jim the smith, that the head of the barrel gave way under him, and with a yell of mingled pain and fear he disappeared from view.

This incident was sufficient to restore the good temper of the multitude, or at all events of the licensed portion. "Serve him right!" "Well done, Joey!" were the cries which now arose; and the riffs amongst the crowd who did not possess miner's rights, seeing they would not be supported by the more respectable portion of the community, prepared to make themselves scarce, and a general rush to the holes ensued.

"After them, boys; if they once get to their holes, you won't unearth them in a hurry," shouted the superintendent; and putting spurs to our horses, away we went helter-skelter in pursuit.

The reader may fancy we had pretty easy work to overtake these fellows, but this was anything but the case. There were so many mounds of earth, so many deep and dangerous

shafts in every direction, some almost concealed from view by brushwood or dwarf scrub, that our pursuit was one of the most difficult operations imaginable. The fellows would take advantage of this, and double around these holes in a most annoying manner, leaping forth and back over them, while they chuckled at the idea of one of us going in headlong—a mishap which might have been anything but pleasant, as some of these holes were from a hundred to a hundred and fifty feet deep, though the majority of them varied probably from ten to forty feet in depth.

An accident of this kind actually did happen; for as I was following a long-legged fellow, whose puffing and blowing showed me that his wind was failing him, I saw another rascal coming down a slope of the hill-side as hard as he could tear, and Matthews on his bony roan charger peppering after him at a gallop, whirling his sword around his head, and laughing at the excitement of the chase to such a degree that the tears rolled down his cheeks. The pursued was a Chinese, and the ludicrous expression of terror written upon his countenance, his long pigtail, which waved at his stern like the broad pennant of an admiral's three-decker, and the shuffling, extraordinary run which his clumsy shoes rendered compulsory, made me join in Matthews' merriment. My mirth, however, was of short duration, for as the Chinaman reached the bottom of the slope, he made a momentary pause, bent down, and then gave a clear spring over what I took to be a bush. On thundered Matthews in his rear; he, too, reached the furze bush, when his horse stopped suddenly in the midst of its gallop, by throwing himself back on his haunches, and sticking his fore-feet in the ground, while the rider went flying over his head. I should not have been frightened at this, had not a sharp cry escaped from Matthews' lips, followed by the hollow splash of water; so I spurred to the spot, and there a picture worthy of the pencil of Leech or Doyle met my view.

From the centre of a deserted hole, full of muddy water to the brim, emerged the boots and ankles of the unlucky trooper, at which only visible portion of his master the raw-boned charger—still in the same attitude, which closely resembled that of an eager terrier watching a rat hole—was

intently gazing; and at about five yards distance on the other side of the hole crouched the Chinaman, sitting on his heels, his mouth expanded into a wide grin, while waving his licence above his head, he hallooed, in disjointed sentences, "You no savvy; you no wise man, Masser Joey, to run down man what got licence. John got licence. John all right; but him hab bit joke wid Joey. How you like water? Hou you feel himself? No catch Johnny, Masser Joe; him heartful—too sharp!" and then the fat Celestial would roll himself from side to side in the excess of his mirth.

Enjoy this scene as I certainly did, I saw that there was no time to lose. Matthews had evidently been pitched into a shallow hole of some five feet in depth, but his head was stuck in the mud at the bottom, and unless quickly extricated, he would be suffocated. So, taking off my belt, I succeeded in throwing it around my mate's feet, and with some difficulty dragged him to the bank.

What a spectacle he presented! daubed with a half-mask of sticky yellow clay as far as the nostrils, his shako gone, the sleeves and collar of his jacket forming separate little channels for the draining off of the water, and his smart uniform soiled and saturated. I am sure that directly I saw he was alive, striving to force open his solitary eye (he had but one), which the clay plastering rendered a difficult feat to accomplish, and to cough up the quantum of muddy water he had involuntarily swallowed through incautiously entering his bath with his mouth open, I thought I should have expired with suppressed laughter.

In less than five minutes my mate was himself again, or at least strong enough to remount his horse and ride to the rear. When I mounted my own steed, the fellow I had been pursuing prior to Matthews' mishap was, to use a sporting expression, "nowhere." Without doubt, he had got to his hole, and knew too well that no efforts would be made to dislodge him.

I took a hasty glance over the field of action. My immediate neighbourhood was well-nigh deserted. In my rear, the ground over which we had advanced, the miners were, many of them, setting to work again; the rest, in company with the women and children, were gazing towards the



opposite side of the flat, where the other party of police had not succeeded in making so pacific a progress as we had done. I could see that a pretty shindy was being kicked up there. Stones and sticks were flying through the air, while the shouts and imprecations of the combatants were clearly audible.

About halfway between where I stood and this swaying, struggling mob, were visible the superintendent and his little body of horse and foot, hurrying on to the relief of their comrades, while a little way in their rear walked six prisoners in irons, guarded by two troopers. These were all the unlicensed diggers that had yet been captured, for upwards of a hundred had baffled pursuit, and were at this moment at the bottom of their holes, no doubt laughing over their escape. As I could not do any more where I was, I now made the best of my way after my mates, whom I soon succeeded in overtaking.

I explained to the superintendent the particulars of Matthews' mishap, and then fell into rank, and the advance continued. We could see that our comrades were in difficulties. The staves of the foot constables were playing pretty freely on the heads of the mob, and the flats of the troopers' sabres and the shoulders of their horses were doing still more; but the little party was nearly surrounded, and half a dozen of them had already been knocked down and trodden under foot before the mob noticed our approach.

I guess, though we were only twenty strong (twelve on foot and eight mounted), they did not like the look of us.

"Come, lads, you've had fun enough; for your own sakes you'll now disperse quietly," shouted the superintendent, in a voice of thunder to the crowd, more than half of whom had turned to face us, and had already opened fire with a volley of stones and sticks.

"If you don't stop that, you rascals, we'll make you," cried the superintendent, soon rapidly losing his temper. "I'll give you one minute for all honest men to disperse."

Derisive laughs and jeers, shouts of "Come on! come on if ye dare," was the retort of the mob; while one long slim Yankee fellow cried, "Use yer knives, mates, if they do; I calculate they want bloodletting, anyhow."

"Troopers, draw sabres, prepare to charge! Constables, follow as best you can; and don't be afraid of hitting too hard. Now then. Forward." And the old superintendent's cheeks flushed, and eyes flashed, as he uttered the words of command, for he thought of his *last* charge—when, as Captain of the 17th Lancers, he had led his little band of troops against the overwhelming forces of the Rajah of Bouradar, in the old Sikh war, and forced them to fly in confusion from the field. The present skirmish was as child's play to him, but I am afraid that some of us regarded it differently. I know that as far as I was concerned, I would just as soon have been a hundred miles away, and perhaps sooner.

However, at it we went, and in a compact little wedge divided the mob in our course, as the sharp prow of a yacht would divide a heaving sea. With the flats of our swords we knocked the diggers down. The foot constables rushed into the gap we had made in the enemies' ranks before it could close again, and with their staves seconded us right well. Suffice it to say that we fought our way right through the crowd, and joined our mates, in junction with whom we again charged through the mob with the same success, and by that time the rioters had had enough, and scampered away in every direction, leaving some forty or fifty of their number on the ground, too badly hurt to follow their example; while four of our troopers and five constables were in a similar predicament.

Not a life was sacrificed on either side.

I had come off almost untouched from the struggle, though once my life had been in some peril. The tall Yankee who had so warmly recommended the knife had not hesitated to put his suggestions into practice. I had just knocked down one fellow, and stooped to avoid a stone, when a long bowie knife gleamed before my eyes, and the next moment would doubtless have been my last, had I not seized the arm of the rascal that wielded it, and so arrested the stroke, while I returned the compliment by a heavy blow in the mouth, with the butt end of my revolver, that sent half a dozen teeth down his throat, and effectually cooled his courage.

As soon as the skirmish was over our wounded men were collected together, with as many of the captured rioters as

were capable of moving, and the latter having been handcuffed, we returned to the station.

We had scarcely done dinner when Matthews (who was now all right again), Crawday, and myself were summoned before the superintendent, who wished to know if we would volunteer to return to the gold-field in the character of diggers, and stay there for a week or so, for the purpose of discovering a few of the unlicensed workers, their names, and the locality of the claims, &c.

We readily accepted the service; and that same night, in most artistic make-up, and from a different direction from that of the station, we again reached Forest Creek. We had a tent with us, which we fixed, made a fire, boiled our billy, had tea, and then separately lounged through the camp, and visited various grog shanties to pick up information.

Throughout that evening neither of us was recognised, which gave us confidence, and for more than a week we played our game with more than tolerable success. One night—it was a Saturday night, I remember, for I had been buying some groceries at M'Kenzie's store—I dropped into "The Golden Age" shanty, with the double object of imbibing a nobbler and increasing my stock of information. A good many people were there, and amongst them some of the greatest roughs on the Flat, and I found it an easy matter to join in the conversation, and at length to turn it upon the topic of the recent police raid. It was an hour at which most of the diggers were half-seas-over, and consequently communicative. Many of those who had eluded us on that occasion were not slow to brag of it, and thus I obtained more valuable information on that one night than I had done for the whole preceding week.

It was verging on eleven o'clock when I quitted the shanty, and steered my course in the direction of our tent. It was a stormy night, and there was no moon, so that I had to walk warily on account of the holes so thickly covering the ground. I had, however, accomplished about half the distance in safety, when I was roughly gripped from behind, and thus brought to a halt. The next moment three or four burly fellows surrounded me, and one of them striking a match held it close to my face.

"By George! the very man, mates; the cat-faced snivelling spy himself;" and with a curse the speaker let drop the match and trod it under his boot.

During the momentary glimmer of the lucifer I had recognised him as one of the unlicensed diggers, whom we had captured and marched to the station the preceding week. I had ridden by his side the whole way, and doubtless the fellow had escaped from custody, returned to his hole, recognised me in some shanty, and waylaid me for no good purpose.

"What shall we do with the rascally trap?" cried another.

"Wall, I calculate we'll lynch him," echoed a voice whose nasal twang I thought I remembered.

"No, no, take him down my hole; it's a duffer, and I leave it to-morrow; we can cover him in, and there he'll rest quiet enough until the crack of doom," suggested the first speaker.

"Good! good! a new way of salting a claim," laughed another ruffian, and the motion was carried without a dissenting voice.

The manner of my death decided on, no time was lost in putting it into execution. I was gagged, and borne along a quarter of a mile or so at a run; for although we were in the least frequented and most lonely part of the Flat, an honest digger might perchance have seen us, and then their amiable intentions would most probably have been foiled. No such luck, however, awaited me, and we were soon at the mouth of my selected sepulchre.

It was a pit of about fifty feet in depth, or at least so I conjectured, from the time they took to lower me, and the number of revolutions made by the windlass, which I counted. At length I rested on the damp clay at the bottom of the shaft, the rope was drawn up, and then my persecutors descended in turn, and I was hurried along a drive for some distance, when we came to a halt, and a candle was produced and lighted. My eyes were then unbandaged, and the gag taken from my mouth.

I could now see my enemies. They were four in all. Besides the fellow who had escaped from the station, I recognized the Yankee who had tried to stab me in the skirmish, and—could I believe my eyes?—in one of the other ruffians I

recognized a fellow who had been in the force, and discharged for cowardice and theft ; the latter crime he had at the time tried to slip on to my shoulders, and I had consequently cherished no kindly feeling towards him.

The recognition was mutual on both sides, and Finch growled with a sneer, "The last time we parted you didn't fancy we should meet again so soon, mate."

"Dog! thief! sneaking coward!" I retorted. "Would that I had the power to give you what you deserve!" Then, as an idea struck me, I turned to the other rascals, saying, "This fellow is a trap as well as myself; he was turned out of the force for cowardice, and for a theft that he tried to slip off on me; just as a favour allow me to put it out of his power to gloat over my fate."

This request seemed to tickle the palate of the sallow Yankee. "What say ye, mates? He's fairly drawed the coon to my notion. Why shouldn't we have a little more lark over the matter? A pistol-shot wouldn't be heard down here. Knock down and draw out, I say, and let's see who's the cock that crows craven the first."

"I don't want to fight him, mates; in fact, I won't fight him," said Finch, turning as pale as death.

This refusal, however, on his part, caused the others to declare that he should. "You were the cove what betrayed the trap, and by G—, now we've discovered that you were a trap yourself, he shall have his revenge," said one.

"Stand up, sirree, and take your pick of ways to settle it. You've got your choice of weapons; knives or pistols, just decide."

"Mr. Badgery, I shan't fight him. I decline his challenge," whined the coward, in a supplicating tone.

"But ye shall fight him, ye pitiful, eternal sneak,—ye slinking, psalm-singing varmint of a British-whelped bone-setter; and as ye won't choose yer weapon, I will for ye. There's my revolver, with a single charge in it,—enough for you, I reckon. Who'll lend the other trap a barker? Mind there's only one barrel charged, or he may try to shoot us all and escape."

To me there was something very strange and gloomy in all these preparations. Whether I shot Finch, or he shot me,

my fate was equally sealed—I should never see the light of day more. I knew the hole we were in had been worked out, and that the dark tragedy about to be performed would be for ever hid by the pits being filled up and abandoned. My feelings may be imagined as I stood in this long, narrow drive, surrounded by reckless diggers, jeering and uttering unfeeling comments upon what was passing.

Finch stood twelve paces distant in his red flannel jumper and moleskin pants, holding the long revolver the Yankee had handed him down by his side. A like weapon was now given to me, five charges having been first drawn.

The Yankee said he would give the signal by clapping his hands, bidding me at the same time, with a knowing wink, “to shoot my best, and not think about giving trouble, as it would be just as convenient to fill the earth in upon two of us as one.”

We were now allowed five minutes to prepare, and during that time I noticed the drive where Finch stood was broader than where I had been posted, and that the shadow was greater where he was. This gave him a great advantage over me, but I did not fancy it was worth troubling about. As long as I hit him, I did not care whether he hit me or not; in fact, I would have preferred his shooting me through the head at once, to the lingering misery of being buried alive in such a spot, and suffering a lingering death from starvation or the want of pure air.

“Are you ready now?” growled the Yankee at length.

Finch groaned a response: the sound came hollowly out of the gloom.

The umpire turned to me and repeated the question.

“Quite ready,” I replied; “give the signal when you like.”

It was a moment of terrible excitement. It was strange yet awful to hear the measured “One—two—” of the Yankee echoing out of the darkness. When he called “three” we were to fire.

I felt no fear, but a wild throbbing of delirium was in my brain,—a sensation as though I was an atom in the universe, swept onwards by an unknown but irresistible power through space, while hundreds of fiery stars flashed before my eyes,

and strange inhuman cries sounded in my ears. My sight grew filmy. I strove to pierce the gathering darkness, but I could see nothing distinctly.

"Three!" said the umpire, and clapped his hands.

"Crack! crack!" went the pistols simultaneously, the lurid flashes illuminating the living tomb with a glow of crimson; but only for a moment I saw Finch's pale, ghost-like countenance, his eyes glaring out of his head, a thin stream of blood trickling down from a hole in the right temple, then I heard him fall with a dull "thud" on the damp, cold earth; but the darkness of eternal night was around, for the concussion of air caused by the explosion of our pistols had extinguished the candle.

"Darn it, is it over? Speak, somebody!" hallooed the Yankee.

There was no reply.

"Answer me, some one; and whoever has a match jist strike a light," said the umpire again.

"Dang it, I've been searching every pocket for a match and can't find one," said somebody.

"I've not a match," growled a third voice.

"By George, mates, we must make our way out then in the dark."

"That we must," retorted the Yankee. "I calkerlate both they traps is dead as 'possums, for I don't hear a squeak, so let's get above ground, and begin to fill in the hole. It must be nigh morning already."

Oh, what moments of agony were those to me! A burning, throbbing pain in my right side told me that I was wounded, and upon placing my hand on the spot I felt that my jumper was saturated with moisture,—blood, no doubt. I fancied that I had not many minutes to live, yet the intense horror I felt at the bare idea of being left there—there, in that horrible grave, to die alone and untended,—there, close to the body of the man I had just shot—I cannot describe. I was about to halloo to the retiring diggers,—to beg, to entreat them to spare me, when my intention was arrested by a low rumbling sound, such as I had never heard before. A moment later the earth trembled around me—the air seemed to vibrate—the rumbling noise increased—a loud

snap ! snap ! rang through the mine, and in accents of horror and alarm I heard the Yankee shout, "To the shaft ! to the shaft for your lives ! The props are giving way ! The workings are falling in !"

It was, indeed, true ; the vibration of the double discharge had effected more than the putting out of a candle—it had loosened the ground above. The wooden props placed here and there along the drive had proved unequal to support the additional weight required of them ; and before the Yankee and his mates could reach the mouth of the shaft, tons upon tons of earth, with a crash like thunder, rushed down upon them, burying them for ever beneath its weight.

I could hear their cries and shrieks ring awfully through the mine, but in a second almost they were stilled for ever in the silence of death.

Thus did the punishment of the would-be murderers overtake them. They perished by the very death to which they had doomed me.

For some time I remained on the spot where I had fallen through weakness and the loss of blood, expecting every moment to share a similar fate ; but at last I became convinced that the danger of being crushed to death was over, and with it came a new longing for life. I took off my cravat and belt, and with them contrived to bind up my wounds and stanch the flow of blood. I then lay down a little to collect my strength, and called aloud the name of Finch, fancying he might still be living. My voice rang hollowly through the gloom, but no reply came—not even a groan. It was a childish prejudice, but even the idea of being alone with the dead added fresh horror to my position, and I arose, determined to make at least an effort to escape.

I was very weak, and the air was growing close and oppressive, but I managed to stagger forward until my further progress in that direction was arrested by a wall of clayey earth. I shuddered as I touched it. Was it, or was it not, the wall of my tomb ?

I resolved to make a tour of inspection, and ascertain if there was any exit from this dreadful spot. The only way to discover this was to follow the damp wall all around, keeping my hand against it as I went, so as not to miss any



narrow branching passage that might lead me to liberty. I at once proceeded to put the idea into execution, but I had hardly got nine paces on my way when I stumbled over something. I put my hand down to discover what it was, and withdrew it hastily, for it had rested on the icy countenance of my late antagonist, and touched even a hole in the forehead through which the bullet had torn its way.

Notwithstanding my feelings of horror, I bent down and endeavoured to move the body, but in doing so discovered that up to the shoulders it was buried beneath the fallen earth, and thus fixed firmly to the spot where it lay. This showed me how nearly I had escaped destruction, and also that the fallen *débris* had effectually blocked up the exit by the way we had entered.

As I could do the dead man no good, I now resumed my march of discovery, counting my paces as I went, and never taking my hand from the damp side of my vault. I had counted forty-five paces in this way, when I again stumbled over something, and discovered that, as before, it was the body of poor Finch.

This was the most terrible discovery of all, for it convinced me that I was really surrounded by those frightful walls of clay—that every channel of escape was cut off. I threw myself on the cold, wet ground, and wept and prayed by turns.

At length I fancied that the air was growing oppressively close, and presently it became so bad that I could scarcely breathe.

This forced me to renewed exertion. I again made a circuit of the loathsome vault, rapping the walls at every step with the stock of the revolver which I had used in the duel, and which the Yankee and his gang had forgotten to dispossess me of.

At length I fancied that a rap I gave produced a hollow sound. A faint hope sprang up within my breast; I rapped again and again.

I was not deceived; more and more hollowly resounded the blows. Hope became a conviction, and I now dug away with a short knife that I found in my pocket.

I had laboured thus for about half an hour without

result. My strength was fast leaving me; my wound had begun to bleed afresh from the exertion, when, just as I was about to give up in despair, I found no resistance to my knife, for both knife and arm slipped into an aperture, through which rays of daylight streamed, together with a current of pure air.

What a feeling of intoxicating joy now took possession of me! my strength returned as if by magic; all feeling of faintness passed away. I had soon made the hole big enough to pass my body through; having accomplished which, I found myself at the bottom of an adjoining shaft, of some thirty feet in depth, the top of which was accessible by means of ladders.

Up these ladders (incredible as it may seem) I managed to climb; and when I saw the glorious sun rising above the distant mountain range—that sun which I never expected to see more,—and beheld the lovely face of nature, the tent-dotted plain, the groups of busy labourers already proceeding to their work, then my strength gave way, and with a wild cry of delight I fell insensible to the ground. Whilst still in an unconscious state, some friendly diggers carried me to our tent, where Matthews and Crawday were in great alarm at my prolonged absence. A doctor was speedily summoned, who examined my wound, which he found trifling; the ball had first grazed a rib, and the bleeding had been profuse, but that was all. In less than a week I was able to knock about again, and nearly as strong as ever.

## THE NIGHT FOSSICKERS OF MOONLIGHT FLAT.

PERHAPS life and property were never less secure on the Victorian gold-fields than about the end of the year 1852. It would not have been so had it not at that period been the custom to fix the district head-quarters of the police force in peaceable and orderly neighbourhoods, too far distant from those populous but remote gullies which were the nightly scenes of deeds of robbery and violence. Every evening men were knocked down and brutally treated, or "stuck up" and robbed. Every night horses were stolen, tents broken into, and "holes" plundered of gold by the "night fossickers"—miscreants who watched for the richest holes during the day, marked them, and plundered them at night. At length these desperadoes had become so numerous and shameless, and their outrages so frequent, at a place called Moonlight Flat (near Forest Creek), that the miners rose *en masse* against them. A public meeting was convened, blue-shirted diggers made stirring appeals to their auditory, a deputation was appointed to proceed immediately to Melbourne to remonstrate with the Government, and to implore it to adopt energetic measures for extirpating the "hordes of ruffians" that infested their neighbourhood, and the persons of many of whom were well known there.

It was during the height of this excitement that I received orders to quit Forest Creek, where I had been for some time stationed, and proceed to Moonlight Flat, where, in the character of a digger, I was to make as many discoveries and arrests as I could.

A foot constable named Coulson accompanied me on the expedition. I bore our tent on my shoulders, my mate carried the rest of the traps, and we both started in good spirits for the scene of our future labours, which we reached by sundown.

We pitched our tent in as central a situation as possible, and the consequence was that for the first night or two not a wink of sleep did either of us get. We had encamped in a regular pandemonium. There was murder here, suicide there, revolvers cracking, blunderbusses booming, rifles going off, balls whistling; one fellow groaning with a broken leg, another shouting because he couldn't find the way to his hole, and a third equally vociferous because he had tumbled into one. This man swearing, another praying, a party of returning bacchanals chanting various ditties to different time and tune, or rather *minus* both. Here was one man grumbling because he had brought his wife with him, another ditto because he had left his wife behind, or sold her for an ounce of gold or a bottle of rum. Donnybrook fair was a peaceful scene compared to an evening at Moonlight Flat, for here all bad human passions seemed to be seething, making earth a hell.

Upon the second evening after my arrival, as I was leisurely strolling through the camp, my hands in my pockets, my short cutty pipe between my teeth—to all appearance as true a devotee of pick, shovel, and cradle as any of the heterogeneous mass around me—in passing a tent that stood a little apart from the general run of such like domiciles, I fancied I heard a groan.

I listened for a minute or two for a repetition of the sound, which was presently again audible; there could be no mistake about it now, it was a genuine groan, and no mistake; so feeling that the stock of my revolver was handy—under my jumper—I dashed into the tent, where the first object I beheld was a man hanging to the ridge-pole,\* his feet some ten inches from the ground, and apparently dead.

To pull my knife from my pocket and cut him down was the work of a moment; this done, I removed the ligature from

\* The centre pole of the tent.

his throat, and upon examining it, found it to be a black silk handkerchief, with fringed ends. I then used every endeavour to restore the suicide, as I regarded him, to consciousness. After a time I was successful, and in an hour or so he was sufficiently recovered to converse and express a desire for something to drink.

I fished up a bottle from a corner, and took down a mug from the side pole. The bottle contained whiskey, and we were soon hobnobbing over the genial liquor.

"How on earth did you come to hang yourself, mate?" I asked at length.

"Hang myself!" he retorted, staring me in the face; "I never hung myself, I was strung up by the three rascals who stole my gold."

"Eh? what is that you say?" I asked, with a start, for this explanation aroused a professional interest at once within my breast. "It is a case of attempted murder, then, instead of suicide? The night fossickers have been paying you a visit, friend?"

"They have indeed, mate, and I should have been a dead man in another minute or two if you had not arrived at the very nick of time, and cut me down. I owe my life to you."

"Never mind that, but tell me how all this happened," I said.

"Well, then," commenced the digger, "it fell out in this way. I was just working a new claim, and as the hole looked promising like, I got up this morning earlier than usual and lost no time in setting to work. I was not long at it before I hit upon a 'pocket,'\* full of the precious metal. It lay in a dark corner of the hole, but my fossicking-knife soon brought its glittering beauties to light. Whilst I was complacently contemplating my treasure I heard some one say, 'You've good luck, mate; that's a tidy bit of gold there.' I looked up and saw a tall, lanky digger standing at the brink of the hole, and regarding my discovery with greedy eyes. 'Tolerably well,' I rejoined curtly, at the same time shifting my revolver to show the fellow that I was prepared to defend it too, if necessary. He made no reply, but with a grunt

\* A little hole.

and a surly nod, walked away. Well, my luck had not quitted me yet. Nugget after nugget did that dirty hole give up; by knock-off time\* I had taken out five pounds' weight of gold. To-morrow being the Sabbath, thirty-six hours of suspense had to elapse before I could discover whether this was but a mere passing stroke of luck or the herald of continued good fortune. To-night, for the first time in my life, I was really in dread of an attack, though I kept my success a secret, not even telling my most intimate friends. I did not intend to do so, you may be sure, for on Monday morning my first business would have been to send my gold down to the escort office for security. For the time, however, I was forced to content myself with '*planting*'† it, which I did just inside the tent, and just below where you now stand; if you move you will see where the ground has been disturbed. After I had done this not a footstep passed the tent without my imagining myself robbed of my concealed treasures; and it being Saturday night—the noisiest and most riotous one in the week—my panics were of course neither few nor far between. At last my phantom fears assumed the air of realities—footsteps approached close to the tent, and then stopped. I went out and looked around, but in the darkness I could not perceive any one, so I came inside again, and as I entered my gaze fell upon a little round hole cut in the canvas on the opposite side. I knew it must have been recently done, but the hole itself did not terrify me, it was the solitary eye that gazed through it and was fixed on mine. I am no coward, but I felt an icy chill run through my veins. I plucked my revolver from my belt, but the eye never moved. I pointed it at the hole in the tent, and was about to pull the trigger, when my arm was knocked up from behind and the bullet passed harmlessly through the top of the tent. I found myself in the grasp of two powerful ruffians with blackened faces, who bound me hand and foot, and threatened to blow my brains out if I made the least noise. A third robber, a tall, gaunt man, now entered; his face too was blackened; he pointed to the spot where my gold was buried, and merely uttered the monosyllable, 'Dig!' One

\* Hour of leaving work.

† Concealing.

of the men seized my shovel and set to work with a will ; in another minute my treasure was discovered, and speedily divided. Then the tall, gaunt man again pointed, this time at me, and said the single word, ' Hang ! ' Immediately one of his mates uncoiled a rope from his waist and reeved a noose in it, but the cord was not long enough ; so the tall man growing impatient, tore off his neckerchief and tossed it to my executioner, who soon secured it around my throat, and then attached it to his rope. I now began to call for help, but a knock on the head stunned me, and I remembered no more till I awoke and found you pouring brandy down my throat, and trying to bring me round."

" And the tall man, who seemed to be leader of these rascals, was the cove who spoke to you at your hole in the morning ? " I remarked.

" Was he ? how do you know ? " asked the digger, with a look of surprise.

" I don't *know*, I only *conjecture* it was he. We members of the police force are apt to draw our own conclusions pretty readily," I responded.

" Do you belong to the force ? " asked the digger, with a look of pleased surprise.

" I do ; and I am here on secret service," I said, " so you must not betray me ; but I am desirous to aid you to win back your gold, and to bring these night fossickers to justice. They have been a curse to honest diggers too long ; their depredations must be put a stop to. Try now to recollect whether this tall, gaunt man who broke into your tent and so politely hanged you at all resembled the man who came up to your hole in the morning, just as you discovered your pocket of gold ? "

" Why, he wasn't unlike," said my new acquaintance, scratching his head. " You see I couldn't make out his face owing to its being blackened ; but the figure was much the same, and so was the voice, I reckon."

" Could you swear to the ringleader of to-night, if you were confronted with him ? "

" Darned if I think I could ; but I'd swear to the fellow who came up to the hole in the morning amongst a thousand."

"Had he got on a tie like this?" I asked, producing from my pocket the one that had so nearly terminated his existence.

"No, he had not," was the confident reply; "he wore a blue and white speckled one."

"Describe the appearance of the man who spoke to you in the morning, and I will take it down in my pocket-book," I said.

The digger complied.

"Tall, thin, feet large and rather splay, shoulders round, complexion sallow, full beard and whiskers of a reddish hue, hair long and dark brown, eyes large, dark, and very fierce. *Dress*—blue serge jumper, brown billy-cock hat, blue and white speckled tie; shepherd's plaid trousers, large pattern."

I muttered as I dotted down the separate items, "That will do, mate; but can't you recollect *anything* of the dress or appearance of either of the fellows who stuck you up and hung you this evening?"

"No! I can't for certain; I was struck all of a heap like with surprise; but I feel sure that the tall one was the fellow who came to my claim in the morning, his eyes had the same scowl, but as for his togs and those of his mates I didn't notice what they were like."

Setting my new friend down in my own mind as an arrant paltroun, and seeing that nothing more was to be got out of him, I began to more narrowly inspect the neckerchief, which had performed the duties of a halter. As I said before, it was of black silk with lace ends, but I now noticed that it was moreover made stock fashion, and was intended to fasten behind the neck with two buttons, the ends being brought forward in a double fold, and tied in a bow in front. There was nothing very unusual in all this, but what attracted my attention was the buttons, on each of which appeared the words, "CHANNENS—PLYMOUTH."

"He tried to hang you with this, mate, did he? What will you say if I hang him by it?"

The digger gazed at me in bewilderment.

"Keep a still tongue in your head, say nothing of having met with me, nor even mention the fact of your having been robbed until Monday. Perhaps by that time I may have



nabbed one or more of these worthies. If you do not see or hear anything of me before, I will meet you at 'The Promised Land,' old Mack's shanty, at knock-off hour on that day. Now good-bye, for I must set to work at once," and slapping him on the shoulder, I left the tent.

It was just ten o'clock when I quitted the digger, but it was half-past when I reached my own quarters, for though the distance was only half a mile, I walked very slowly, for I was trying to unravel the mystery that had just presented itself. I kept muttering the words "Channens—Plymouth," "Channens—Plymouth," for somehow I fancied that those two words, innocent as they sounded, would alone bring the criminals to justice. "The probability is, that this Channens is an outfitter or a tailor at Plymouth," I thought, "and that the wearer of that neckerchief bought it there; and if so, most likely he purchased other articles of clothing at the same establishment which bear similarly stamped buttons." The more I pondered upon this probability, the more likely it seemed, and I concluded that I must somehow obtain an inspection of the wardrobe of the tall man of monosyllables, come what might of it.

Fortunately Coulson was in the tent when I reached it, and I told him forthwith every incident of the digger's narrative, read him the description of the supposed ringleader in the matter; and then we held a brief consultation, which resulted in a decision to look in at every shanty on the Flat that night, and see if we could not hit off the scent somewhere.

We accordingly lit our pipes, and sauntered out in different directions, in quest of those *who were wanted*.

It was now about eleven o'clock, and the township was crowded. Some were out to purchase provisions for the ensuing week, others to impart and receive news, but the greater number to squander their gettings in the grog shanties, whose glaring lamps of camphine or naptha threw a ruddy light over the strange forms that passed and repassed beneath them.

I've no time to enter into long descriptions. I was intent on business, and perhaps did not notice the picturesqueness of the scene, as an artist or a poet might have done. I had

eyes alone for the prey I was tracking, the notorious night fossickers.

I dropt into shanty after shanty, however, without success, for nowhere did I see any one answering the description noted in my pocket-book. I was returning home vexed and dispirited, when it struck me that I would re-enter one of the grog-shops I had previously visited, and whose door I was then passing. The thought no sooner entered my head than I acted upon it. The shanty was even more crowded than when I had last visited it, and I recognised several new faces. Amongst others, my eyes rested upon a tall, lanky fellow, who was leaning over the bar imbibing a very stiff glass of brandy and water. He immediately fixed my attention; not that he much resembled the description I had received of the man I was in search of, for his hair, instead of being long and dark, was very short, and of a light red hue, whilst as for whiskers and beard he was quite destitute of either. His complexion, too, instead of being sallow, was florid and freckled, and his dress did not at all accord with that of the man who had visited the digger at his hole in the morning.

In spite of all these discrepancies in look, my suspicions were aroused, for in all other respects his appearance was exact; so, edging up to him, I said, "Well, mate, you and I have met before somewhere."

"May be so; but I don't recollect you," was the surly rejoinder; and he cast a searching glance at me as he spoke.

"Perhaps not; for if my memory don't deceive me, 'twas before either of us set eyes on this land of gold."

"Oh, was it?" he replied more cheerfully. "Then where do you hail from, mate?"

"Why I'm a down-country man, I am; Plymouth's my native town."

The man started. I thought that I could distinguish tears glittering in his large fierce eyes, but whatever emotion he experienced he soon overcame it, and once more turning towards me, said, "You haven't much the accent of a Devonshire man."

"That's because I was brought up and lived some years in

London ; but I'm a Plymothian, nevertheless. It's a pretty place, isn't it ?"

" Ah, it is, indeed," rejoined the tall man, with a sigh.

" What part of the Three Towns\* did you live in, friend ?" I asked innocently.

" Why bless your heart, I lived in—in—in—oh, no, I never lived in Plymouth in my life. I passed through it once ; that's how I came to know the place."

I noticed his hesitation, and thought to myself, " Oh, oh, old fellow, you *do* come from Plymouth. You were about to confess it, and name the very street you resided in, when suddenly something came into your head that made you desirous of concealing the fact, as though its knowledge by a stranger might be dangerous to you." I did not let my thoughts appear upon my countenance, however, but rejoined with an air of disappointment, " Oh, is that all ? I hoped I had fallen in with a fellow-countryman ; and yet I could almost swear that I had seen you there ; ay, and in the shop of my uncle Channens, too."

" I was never at Channens the tailor's in my life ; I never heard the name before," ejaculated the fellow, with a terrified start.

That answer confirmed my suspicions at once. If he had never been at Channens' shop, or heard his name, how could he know he was a tailor ? And if he had been there, and did not know him, why should he be afraid to own it ? " He remembers the buttons on the neckerchief," I thought, and as events proved, I thought rightly.

" I beg your pardon, sir," I said in tones of apology, " but I did not mean to offend you. Will you have a nobbler with me ?"

The fellow consented, but he imbibed the liquor in silence, and only gave a parting nod when I paid the score, and wished him good night. He felt that his tongue had betrayed him once, and he did not care to trust it to wag again in my presence.

My reflections, as I walked home, were very satisfactory.

\* Plymouth, Stonehouse, and Devonport join each other, and are termed The Three Towns.

I felt persuaded that I was on the right track, and though I was not yet possessed of sufficient proofs whereon to arrest the man, I fancied that they would soon be forthcoming.

Whilst talking to the rascal at the shanty, I had contrived, unperceived by him, to cut a button from his trousers, and I had it now in my waistcoat pocket. It was a brace button; and as he wore a belt, he might not discover his loss for some time. When I reached our tent I eagerly lit a candle, drew this button from my pocket, and looked at it. Yes, as I anticipated, there the words "Channens—Plymouth" encircling the rim.

This was moral evidence sufficient to satisfy any one, but to make sure of a conviction the connecting links still required strengthening. Besides, I wished to discover the purloined nuggets for the sake of the poor digger who had lost them, and to do this I must not be too precipitate.

The idea struck me that the next night being Sunday, and the diggers not at work, that these night fossickers would very probably make an excursion to the hole that had turned out such a pretty nest egg, and try to plunder from it still more of the precious metal. I imparted my suspicions to Coulson, who coincided with my views on the subject; and we resolved to lie in ambush close to the hole, and endeavour to nab them in the very act.

Having arranged the whole plan of the campaign over a pipe of Barrett's twist, we turned in for the night, or rather morning, for it was nearly one o'clock, and had a good sleep.

The next day was a day of rest, for the quietness of the diggers on a Sunday is striking. There seems a general agreement to cease from the usual occupations; consequently, it is extremely rare to find anybody engaged in actual mining on that day. But it will be easily understood that, situated as miners are, they have few resources to fall back on for employment of mind or body during that period of rest. Many thousands are brought together, separated at once from the comforts and restraining influences of a home and family, and pursuing a vocation of a speculative and irregular character. It was my first Sunday at the Gold Fields, so I noticed the way that the Sabbath was kept with interest. I

observed some games in progress, and little groups of people looking on. Many were chopping wood, or performing little duties about their tents. The pipe seemed a great comfort. Most of the diggers were well dressed, and many women and children were walking about or sitting at the entrances of tents. Bills were posted on the gum trees along the road, intimating that the minister of some particular sect would preach that day, and giving the hour and place. There was, however, no place of worship on the Flat, and it is not surprising that the camp preachers complained of a thin attendance and an uncertain flock, when the skittle-alley and the shanty offered such strong counter attractions.

A month or two later than the period of which I write, there was a canvas church erected at Moonlight Flat. Later still an Episcopalian wooden structure, the model whereof was evidently taken from Noah's Ark, sprang up on the township; and then, as though out of a spirit of opposition, a stone building, calling itself a Primitive Wesleyan chapel, reared its square walls exactly opposite.

As for myself, I am sorry to say I passed the day as idly and irreverently as the rest, for I did nothing but read and smoke until nightfall, when Coulson and I made a jolly good tea of damper and beefsteak; and it being by this time quite dark, we armed ourselves, and set out for our ambuscade.

It was a fine night, but there was no moon. Still the stars shed quite sufficient light for our purpose, and in fact a less degree of obscurity would have been objectionable. We took up our quarters close to the hole we came to watch, being hid from view by the trunk of a gum tree that had recently been cut down, and now lay prostrate on its parent earth within a few yards of the hole.

It was just nine o'clock as we got into ambush, and we lay flat on the ground behind the log for at least a couple of hours, before our attention was attracted by the slightest sound of approaching footsteps. Every few minutes one of us would peer over the barrier in the direction of the township, for the claim we were watching was one of the most remote on the diggings, and there was only a stray tent or two within a good quarter of a mile of it.

We were still in our ordinary diggers' clothes, but we had

our trusty revolvers with us, and did not fear encountering any three men on the Flat.

"By George, Brooke, here they come," whispered Coulson at length, giving me a nudge, and dipping his head out of sight.

I took a momentary peep, and there, sure enough, just a hundred paces distant, and coming directly towards the spot where we lay, were three men.

Luckily they were approaching from an opposite direction.

As they drew nearer I could see that one was very tall and lanky, and the others stouter and more compactly built. "Oh! oh! my friend of the shanty and his mates," I thought to myself, and sure enough I was right, for coming straight up to the hole the tall one jumped in without hesitation, (it was barely nine feet deep), and began fossicking for his life.

"Are you sure this is the right 'un, Ned?" asked one of his companions from above.

"Right one, of course I am; I know it by that felled gum tree close by," was the irritable rejoinder.

This reply seemed satisfactory, for the questioner, without more ado, leaped into the hole and whipping out his knife set to work with a will, while the third rascal kept watch at the top.

The dark lantern they had lit shed no light above the surface of the shaft, so that although we could hear every movement below and distinguish every word uttered, yet the form of the sentinel, though not more than half a dozen paces from us, was barely discernible.

Coulson was anxious to rush out and capture the fellows there and then, but upon my whispering to him that such a course might prevent us from ever discovering where they had concealed the treasure stolen from the digger's tent; and, indeed, prevent us from bringing the attempted murder home to them as speedily as if we spied their movements a little longer, he altered his views and agreed with me that it was wiser to watch and wait.

"There's a nugget, by the powers, as big as a pigeon's egg," ejaculated one of the fossickers in accents of delight.

"Ay, ay, that's a good haul, anyhow," grunted his mate.

"What have *you* found, Bill?" interrogated the first speaker, who by his voice I knew to be the worthy whom I had so effectually pumped at the shanty.

"Find! why not much: two or three bits the size of shirt buttons, that's all," was the dissatisfied reply.

There was silence now for a few minutes, but at length one of the fellows grunted, "I'm blowed if I can find anything worth taking. It's hard work and little pay, that's what it is."

"I don't think so, Bill, I don't dislike the work," said the other.

"No, perhaps not, with your pigeon's eggs; but I'm not in luck, and I tell you what, I don't see the fun at all of working in these damp dismal holes at the dead of night, and breaking one's back with the stooping, when there's lots of tents on the Flat with the nuggets ready cut and dried for us."

"Yes, that's all very well, but tent work's a dangerous game to play too often. There is sometimes as much lead as gold to be got. You don't always come across a rank coward such as the one we strung up the other night."

"May be not, but there's generally a safe and sure way of doing these things if a fellow only bides his time. Why, I've made away or helped to make away with nine men since I entered the profession, and stuck up and robbed about twenty more, and I've never had a ball through me yet."

"Nor been nabbed?"

"No, nor been nabbed; but then I was never such a fool as to hang my man with my best Sunday neck-tie, particularly when it bore my tailor's mark upon it."

"Cuss you, Bill, hold your jaw about that neckercher. 'Twas a stupid piece of business I own, and I must go and cut the fellow down to-night, and get possession of it again. I don't suppose any one has discovered the body yet, the tent's in such a lonely place."

"No fear of that, the fellow might hang there for a month of Sundays, and nobody would miss him. Moonlight Flat ain't the spot for neighbourly kindness and attention, I reckon."

"Nevertheless I'll cut him down to-night; that booby at

the shanty with his Plymouth talk and his Uncle Channens made me feel uncomfortable like."

"Oh! hang him, he's a fool, he is. A new chum and no mistake. I heard him jabbering away to you a good 'un, and wondered how you could abide him so patiently. There's nothing to be feared from him."

"May be your right; at all events I've cut every button off my togs that answers to the name of Channens, so that if the infernal neck-tie should attract attention they can't bring the matter home to me. I haven't been three times imprisoned and twice transported for nothing, mate."

"And it strikes me that you won't be scragged for nothing in the end. The mare with three legs\* will never have a more worthy rider than Spider-legged Ned the Night Fossicker."

"Dang it, Bill, hold your jaw and turn the lantern this way. I see the gleam of gold."

During the whole of the preceding conversation the fellows had not for a moment ceased from their labours, but from their silence on the subject we concluded that they had not had any finds. Now, however, we could hear them grunting unqualified praises over the gleaming nuggets that their fossicking knives had, without doubt, exposed to view, and this excitement was shared by the sentinel above, for, relaxing his vigilance, he lay down on his stomach and peered into the hole to catch a glimpse of the glittering treasure. To judge from his smothered ejaculations of "Oh my!" "By George!" "What beauties!" "What sparklers!" his admiration was unbounded, and so long did it continue that his mates at length warned him angrily to return to his duty.

At length they resumed their labours, which they continued for another hour, and then we observed them hand up a bag to their companion on the surface, and clamber out of the hole. When, after gazing cautiously around as though timid of observation, they began to retrace their steps towards the township.

Letting them get some distance the start of us, we emerged from our ambushade, and guided by the sound of their foot-

\* Gallows.



steps more than by seeing them, for heavy clouds had now obscured the starlight and it was very dark, we managed with great trouble and difficulty to keep on their trail. Instead of making straight for the township, they skirted it, crossing the most dangerous line of country for unfenced shafts and deserted holes on the Flat. It was now with no little risk that we kept on their track, for every moment we were in danger of our lives; still, we managed it somehow.

We had proceeded in this manner about a mile or so, when we heard a sharp cry from before us, and the unmistakable sound of a heavy body falling down a deep pit, rebounding from side to side in its descent, and at last plunging with a hollow splash into water at the bottom.

We paused at once in our advance, for we knew that it must be one of the night fossickers, whom, in the thick darkness, had walked right into a hole.

The echo of footsteps in front ceased suddenly.

"By George, he must have fallen into the old Tolvadden shaft, the deepest on the Flat. He's as dead as a door nail by this time, poor fellow," remarked a voice, which I recognised as Bill's.

"Yes, 'tis the Tolvadden shaft; and he must be dead, for it's nearly a hundred and fifty feet deep," rejoined the other of the two survivors, whom I knew to be Mr. Channens' customer.

"Tom! Tom! speak man if you are alive," shouted Bill down the hole.

"Fool! would you risk alarming the neighbourhood?" hissed his comrade in his ear, pulling him away from the shaft. "He has not got the bag of gold with him. Come along with you."

"Ned, I believe you pushed him in, by G— I do!"

"Dolt! idiot! Why should I push him in? The man never harmed me. I tell you he fell in by accident, and as he is quite sure to be dead, come away. We can do no good to him by staying here, and we risk our own safety."

"Well, if I thought he was dead I wouldn't mind, but I don't like the idea of deserting a mate. Honour amongst thieves, you know."

"He must be dead, I tell you. He can't be other than

dead. It would be more than a miracle if he had a spark of life in him," said Spider-legged Ned, impatiently, as he forcibly dragged his companion away.

"Come along, Coulson," I whispered. "That Ned's an out-and-out scoundrel ; but the poor fellow must be killed, and our business this night is with the living more than the dead."

The ground now became clearer, but still required wary walking. The two fossickers strode on in silence, for stray tents were now scattered around the neighbourhood. At length, after about three quarters of a mile more had been traversed, they came to a momentary halt, and then made their way to a tent that stood about fifty yards in the rear of two others. This they entered, and we immediately posted ourselves on the outside, where, through a rent in the canvas, we could observe all that passed within.

A light was soon struck, a tallow dip lighted and stuck in an old bottle, which, for want of a table whereon to stand it, was placed on the ground. My friend of the shanty then fished a bottle of rum out of an obscure corner of the tent, together with a broken wine-glass and a horn cup. Reserving the latter for himself on account of its holding the largest measure, Spider-legged Ned filled both to the brim, and handing the wine-glass to his friend, said, "A drop of this will keep up your pecker, man ; you look as crestfallen as if you were going to be married ?"

"Do I?" said Bill, drily. "Then you look as crestfallen as if you were going to be hanged."

"Don't fear, mate. The rope that's to hang me has not been woven ; I shall cheat the gallows yet," answered the other with a laugh. "But to work, Bill. We are losing precious time. Let's bury the gold, and then go and cut down the digger."

"All right, Ned—to work !"

Spider-legged Ned took a long dram out of the bottle on the excuse that there was no time to stand upon ceremony, and his companion was not slow in following his example. Then Ned laid hands on his shovel, and began to dig a hole wherein to deposit the stolen treasure.

"Why not bury it in the same pit that we dug for the nuggets that we shook from the tent last night, just under that box, mate?" asked Bill, as he lit his pipe.

"Because there's safety in scattering it," was the reply. "Don't you know that there are as great rascals as ourselves on the Flat? Well, suppose some scamp was to discover us one day burying gold; he might contrive to outwit us in some way, sharp as we are, and then if all our earnings was hid in one hole he'd just get the lot; but if we bury what we get every time in a fresh place, he would only discover one nest egg, and the other would be safe. Then these traps, too——"

"Dang the traps. Don't start that subject, because I don't like it. Thank heaven there are none of them idle, prying, mischief-making fellows on this Flat; if there was, I should soon make myself scarce. Just get on with your work, Ned; it's two o'clock in the morning."

Ned readily complied, and dug away for very life. When he had reached a depth of about a couple of feet, the bag of nuggets was dropped in, the hole filled up, the earth trodden down, and an old sack thrown carelessly over the spot until the ground should resume its usual aspect.

The rum bottle was now again had recourse to, and pretty nearly polished off, and then the two worthies prepared to set out for the tent of the digger whom they had plundered and thought they had murdered the night before, with the intention of cutting him down, in order to recover the neck-tie whose buttons Spider-legged Ned feared might possibly prove troublesome to him.

"I daresay you think me a fool, Bill," he said, as though to apologize for a feeling which his mate might consider childish and fidgetty, "but when you have studied the world and literature as I have done, particularly the 'Police Gazette' and 'Newgate Calendar,' you will be aware that trifles often lead to great discoveries."

"Perhaps so; perhaps so, Ned. These nice calculations ain't much in my line; but there was always a spark of the lawyer in you, so if you must do the thing why come and do it."

"All right, man; but can't you lend me a spare handkercher, it's a bitter cold morning, and I've got a sore throat; anything will do that keeps the wind out and the warmth in," said Spider-legged Ned, coughing.

"No ; I can't. I don't wear such nick-nacks, and I don't keep them to lend to my friends. For heaven's sake don't be so old womanish, but come along," replied Bill, testily.

"Follow me, Coulson, quickly ; the moment has come," I whispered to my comrade ; and creeping round to the tent door, I entered, and taking the identical scarf from my pocket, held it towards Master Ned, exclaiming, "My countryman from Plymouth is very welcome to wear a scarf of my Uncle Channens if his throat is sore, and he will accept of the loan."

Spider-legged Ned recognised both me and the neckerchief in a minute. I saw his cheek pale and his lip quiver, but he recovered his pluck almost instantly, and stammered, "Who the fury are you and your Uncle Channens ? What brings you here ? And whose old cravat is that in your hand ?"

"I will answer your questions backwards, sir," I answered, sternly. "The cravat is your own, and it is the one with which you hung a digger named John Ivy. Channens is the name of the outfitter in Plymouth where you bought that cravat. My name is James Brooke. I am a detective officer. And lastly, my business here is to arrest you on the charges of robbery with violence, and as being an escaped convict from Western Australia."

"Take that for your trouble, trap," cried a voice close by me, and I saw Ned's mate covering me with his revolver, but before he could pull the trigger Coulson rushed in, and with one blow sent him head over heels to the other end of the tent, where, springing upon him before he could recover himself, he wrenched away his weapon, and clapped the darbies on him in a trice.

Meanwhile, however, I was having a desperate tussle with Spider-legged Ned, who made an effort to rush past me and escape, but I caught him a blow on his chin that sent him reeling. I didn't like to fire my revolver, as Government discountenanced the use of firearms if a capture could possibly be effected without ; and a week previously one of the mounted troopers had been discharged from the service and imprisoned for being too ready with his pistols.

Ned came to the scratch again in a minute. He dared not draw his own weapon, for it was covered by his jumper, and

he knew that before he could handle it I could shoot him down, so he suddenly lowered his head and made a butt at me, as a bull would do, a style of fighting much in vogue amongst the niggers of the West Indies. He calculated, doubtless, that I should jump on one side, and that thus he could dart by me and out of the tent. But he calculated without his host, for I tripped him up as he passed, and then stunned him with a blow on the head from the stock of my pistol, after which I handcuffed him.

For fear of a riot amongst the rowdies, we at once marched the prisoners out of the camp, which, by the time the first streaks of daylight showed themselves in the east, was four miles in our rear. By eleven o'clock we reached an out-station of the mounted police: the two fossickers were thrown into different cells, and the next morning brought before two justices of the peace, who, upon our united evidence, and that of John Ivy the plundered digger, who swore that Spider-legged Ned was the man who had held the conversation with him at his hole the preceding Saturday morning, and closely answered the appearance and possessed a similar voice to the man who had prompted the others to hang him the same evening, they were both committed to stand their trial at the ensuing criminal sessions at Melbourne.

John Ivy recovered the gold stolen from his tent, as well as that subsequently plundered from his claim, for we had heard the fellows confess where the former had been secreted, and beheld the latter buried. The rascal, too, who had fallen down the shaft, was not killed by the fall, but was hauled out of the pit the following day by some miners who happened to be passing the Tolvadden claim, and heard his cries for help. Spider-legged Ned *had* pushed him in, doubtless, to save sharing the plundered gold with him; and Tom Jude, for such was the man's name, was so enraged against his treacherous mate, that he turned Queen's evidence, and disclosed every iniquity that this trio of ruffians had committed on the diggings.

Without his assistance our links of evidence were so complete that we should have been sure of a conviction on at least three charges. But Tom Jude's testimony disclosed

even more serious crimes. Three murders against Spider-legged Ned, or, as he was called in the indictment, Edward Barton, *alias* Edward Brunton, *alias* Thomas Dunn, *alias* Michael Dunealy, and two murders and sundry other crimes against his comrade Bill, or William Hagarty, the result of which was that they were condemned to death, and were duly executed at the Central Gaol, Melbourne, about three weeks or a month later.

## THE SALTED CLAIMS.

ONE day during my stay at a gold-field called the Galunga Diggings, I was walking leisurely down a gully, when I heard a lusty hurraing at a neighbouring hole, and perceived a digger with whom I was acquainted by sight running towards me. A moment later he stood breathless at my side, and invited me to go and see a nugget nearly as big as his finger. No nuggets had yet been found close on that spot, but only small gold, so the discovery seemed to me rather surprising. I hastened on, however, but before I could gain the spot I heard a man say, "Well, I have sold the nugget and my hole for five pounds fifteen."

"Where is the nugget?" I asked.

"Oh!" said he, "the man who bought it has gone off with it."

Now I found out that there really was a nugget, but I also conjectured that it had first been put in by this fellow, an old Bendigo digger, in order to sell his hole. The nugget was probably worth half the purchase money, and the hood-winked buyer of the hole might dig on with ardour but would soon come down to the rock, and scarcely a particle of gold reward his pains.

This trick for getting rid of a worthless hole is called *salting a claim*.

In order to enable my readers, or such of them as have not worked at the diggings, better to understand this tale, I will relate some of the circumstances under which gold is generally found.

At the surface-diggings the gold is discovered lying on the

very top to the depth of from six to fourteen inches, and sometimes still deeper. These diggings have always been on the face or side of a hill, and generally such a hill faces east or south-east. It is found in all sorts of earth, excepting the *black alluvial soil*, in or amongst gravelly earth, and small quartz, or in hard, marly clay. The average yield of this sort of diggings is about an ounce of gold to a cart-load of earth, and three men with a cradle can dig up and wash six or seven loads a day. It was at this kind of diggings that a party of three, whom I knew, obtained in eleven days 37 oz. 2 dwts. each. But some of the surface-diggings yield much more. In some particular spots parties of three or four have obtained 300, 400, and 500, even in one instance 800 ounces in two or three days ; but taking them all together they yield about an ounce to a load of earth. In sinking, the deepest of the holes might be eighteen or twenty feet, certainly not deeper ; and the shallowest two, three, and four feet, so that the average would be about eight or ten feet. As they keep sinking they try a dishful of the earth occasionally until they find that it will pay for washing. They frequently find a few particles from within a couple of feet from the top, but they in general have to go within a foot of the rock before they find it to pay them ; it is then found sometimes in a hard, marly substance. The rocks are mostly blue or grey slate, and in general covered with a few inches of tough clay, in which gold is seldom or ever found. But on the top of the clay a bed of small gravel is found in which gold most abounds, the nuggets and larger pieces being often discovered in this gravel.

Now the nugget which the fraudulent digger had pretended to discover in order to get rid of his hole, he stated he had found in this lower stratum of clay ; a very improbable thing in itself, but it was still more improbable that, having made such a discovery, he would be willing to sell his hole without making further search, for so small a sum as five pounds fifteen, or rather two pounds seventeen, after deducting the value of the nugget.

"I must keep my eye upon that fellow," I thought to myself ; but as the affair would only amount to a misdemeanour, even if he was convicted on the charge, and the



result be merely a few months' imprisonment at the most, I didn't trouble myself much about it; thinking that Mr. James Donnithorne would be sure to put his foot deeper into the mire before long, and consequently be a fatter prize for capturing.

It was about a fortnight after the transfer of the salted claim that I came across Donnithorne's victim. He was a young man of scarcely twenty-five years of age. He must once have been handsome, but now his face had grown very haggard and thin, his cheekbones become unduly prominent, and his face of nearly the colour of old parchment. It was on the evening of the day upon which he had deserted his hole, upon proving it to be a duffer,\* and I don't think I ever saw a fellow look so cut up in my life. I soon managed to make his acquaintance, and then discovered that he was quite a new chum, and that this was the first claim he had ever worked; in fact he had only been in the colony about three months, and on the diggings as many weeks.

I asked him to come to Poole's shanty and do a chop and a nobbler with me, an invitation he readily accepted, and as it was early in the day we got a room all to ourselves, where, chops and etceteras disposed of, my new acquaintance became communicative, and I had no great difficulty in getting him to narrate his history, which ran, as nearly as I remember, as follows:—

“My name is John Tucker. I was born at Marazion, a small town or rather village in the extreme west of England, situated on the shores of Mount's Bay. My father was a fisherman, an honest man and an upright, but from early boyhood I aspired to a higher position than that to which he had attained. My education in the village school did not content me. My natural talent, my steadiness of character, and my earnest desire to rise in the world, interested the clergyman of the parish in my favour. He offered to aid my views by giving me lessons in Euclid, mathematics and natural science. I eagerly accepted his offer, and I have every reason to believe that I did justice to the efforts of my

\* Worthless one.

kind teacher, for I learnt quickly, and what is more I remembered what I learnt. I determined to make for myself a name, and as I had a passionate longing to be a sailor, I bound myself an apprentice on board a merchantman.

“During the first year or two of my apprenticeship I spent every leisure moment in study, and in order to buy the necessary books I became a teetotaller, and in their purchase spent the money which else had been squandered in the public-house. At the age of twenty-one I was second mate, at twenty-three I passed my examination as first mate, and now at no long period of time ahead I saw a mastership in perspective. At this period of my life I fell in love with a very beautiful girl some eight years my junior. My love was more madness than anything else, as first love generally is. However, the young lady favoured my advances with encouragement, and within a month we were engaged, the marriage being appointed to come off directly I obtained the rank of master, which I hoped to do in some twelve or thirteen months time. A few weeks after my engagement I went to sea again, but only for a short voyage, and when I returned my lady love seemed as glad as ever to see me, and exhibited every demonstration of constancy and devotion. Well, I couldn't stay at home long, much as I desired to do so. I was suddenly recalled to my ship, which was lying at Liverpool, and a week later we were on the wide sea again, bound for the Greek ports with a cargo of miscellaneous merchandise, or, as the Yankees would term it, 'notions.' We made a prosperous run, discharged cargo at Corfu and at some of the neighbouring islands, and reloaded with wines, preserved fruits, oil, &c., with which we ran home in about six weeks. Again Liverpool was our port, and no sooner had we been warped alongside the wharf than I obtained a week's leave, and went down by rail to Plymouth, whither Eva Field, my *fiancée*, had been taken by her mother for the benefit of her health, it being feared that she was consumptive. I had not received a letter from her for a long time, although she knew well the ports at which our vessel would touch, and had promised to send a letter to each one consecutively to await my arrival. Only one of these

promised epistles had come to hand, and that was a very short note, and anything but a comforting one. I knew that she was very variable in temperament, passionate, suspicious, and jealous, so I did not think very deeply of all this, concluding that half an hour's conversation would set all right again; and as in a fortnight's time I meant to go in for my examination for master, I trusted that she would marry me off hand, spend the honeymoon in Liverpool, and take the first voyage with me in the vessel I should be appointed to. All these fine hopes were destined to be crushed, and that speedily. I had great difficulty in finding Eva's whereabouts, but at last—more by chance than otherwise—discovered that, with her mother and sisters, she occupied apartments in Union Street; in fact it was through seeing one of her sisters looking out of a first-floor window as I passed along that I did find it out at all. I was asked to walk in, and met with a kind reception, but Eva?—I looked for her in vain.

“‘Where is Eva?’ I asked; and the answer I received made my brain whirl and my heart nearly burst with grief and passion. The mother told me ‘that Eva had grown very intimate with a young surgeon who lived a little way down the street: that she visited him daily, in defiance of her commands to the contrary, and that she feared he had not only alienated her affection from her parents, but won her love from me.’

“I happened to know this young fellow. I had been acquainted with him for a long time, and was aware that he bore the reputation of being tolerably steady, and of fair moral character. I knew also that he had known Eva for some years, and had always been on speaking terms with her, so I did not fancy that matters were so far gone as Mrs. Field had represented them to be. I said I would walk down Union Street to his house, and let her see that I had returned, and this I accordingly did at once. It was only a five minutes' stroll, so I was presently knocking at his door. Eva must have seen me pass, for she answered the door herself. She was very pale, and greeted me very coldly; called me ‘Tucker,’ and told me to wait in the doorway while she

went in and put on her hat and shawl. She was about five minutes doing this, and I heard a tittering inside which I have no doubt was at my expense. At last she came out, and said 'that Mr. Smith had told her to ask me in, but that she had made an excuse for me because I had my rough sailors' clothes on.' I made no reply, and we walked home together; but no sooner had we got into her mother's sitting-room than she commenced upbraiding me in the most bitter manner for things whereof I was perfectly guiltless, and demanded a return of all the letters she had written me, and that I would consider our engagement at an end.

"My passion was now aroused, for I had loved the girl truly and devotedly, and this treatment pierced me to the heart. I threw the letters she had written me—and which until now I had kept in a pocket next my heart—into the fire, and watched the flames consume them with a feeling of savage glee. Then I turned towards her, pointed to the quivering ashes, and without a word, quitted the house. I was too proud to call next day and try to make my peace, which I believe I should have succeeded in doing, but by the first train in the morning went down to Marazion on a visit to my father and mother.

"Three days later I saw in *The Cornish Telegraph* an announcement of the marriage of Eva Field to John Smith, and then I regretted my precipitation, and that I had not made some overtures towards a reconciliation ere it was too late. I learnt about a week later, from a relative of the bride's, that she had only married to spite me, and for the reason that she believed I had been leading a gay life in Liverpool. I was more riled than ever with her upon hearing this, and fancying from what I heard, that though married she loved me still, and more to avenge myself than for any other reason, returned to Liverpool, and, like an idiot that I was, got married in less than a week to a girl whom I had never known before.

"Well, after this all my chance of passing for master was gone. My capabilities for study vanished. I took to hard drinking, and in my next voyage, owing to being drunk on watch, I got the ship on the rocks, where she became a

total wreck, though, happily, no lives were lost. Of course, all hopes of promotion were up after that. I took a hatred to the sea; and having received a letter from my brother some time previously, narrating how well he was doing in Australia, I resolved to come out with my wife and child.

"After a three months' voyage, we dropt anchor in Port Phillip Bay, landed the next morning, and went to the address mentioned in my brother's letter. Imagine my surprise upon learning that this brother, whom we at home thought was doing so well, had become bankrupt (he was a saddler by trade), and gone nobody knew whither. Neither I nor my wife knew another soul in the colony, and we had only twenty pounds in our pockets. Out of that money we bought a tent, pick, shovel, and other camp requisites, and set out for the diggings. When we arrived here I had but six pounds in my pocket, and while looking about me the day after, I was fool enough to credit that d——d cheat Donnithorne, and give him five pounds fifteen for a hole not worth a straw."

\* \* \* \* \*

I saw that the poor fellow was actually desponding; he had but sixpence in the world, his wife was prostrated with Colonial fever, and, in short, he was in as unpleasant a quandary as ever fell to the lot of a new arrival on a gold field. I was really sorry for him, but what could I do? I could only give him plenty of sympathy, which I did, and also promised to use every endeavour to bring to justice the scamp who had sold him the salted claim. Urging him by all means to avoid meeting the fellow and taking the law into his own hands, which, from his violent denunciations and threats I feared he intended to do. After a second and third nobbler, however, my new acquaintance cooled down, and soon after took his leave.

Now when I had been first shown the nugget with which the fraudulent digger had salted his claim, I felt convinced that he had never found it in the hole from which he pretended to have dug it. This hole lay where a watercourse had once been, and I was sufficiently a miner to know that gold found in the watercourses, or in those places where

watercourses formerly existed, is always more or less smooth and water-worn. This nugget, however, was a rough, nubby one, such an one in fact as would be found in a hole *on the side of a hill*, in what is known as a surface digging, where gold is invariably of the roughest kind, as having been least exposed to friction, never having been in a watercourse.

I believe this fact alone would have been sufficient whereon to convict the fellow, but my plan was always to make things doubly sure, and I determined to wait a while, and, if possible, catch my man in some piece of rascality that I could bring more directly home to him. I conjectured that he would soon mark out another claim, and that if after a week or two's digging he found nothing in it, he would salt it as he had done the last, and try to get rid of it in the same manner.

I soon contrived to introduce myself to the fellow, for etiquette at the diggings is somewhat lax, and before long ingratiated myself into his confidence.

He was a stout, broad-chested fellow of about forty; none of your brutal-looking roughs, but bearing the cringing servility of a petty tradesman, united with the foppish impudence of a town swell. His face was smooth shaven, a rare thing at the diggings; and this, aided by a pair of silver-rimmed spectacles, gave him somewhat the appearance of a dissenting minister; but there was a snakey glitter in his small, twinkling, steel-grey eyes, that betokened cunning and deceit as plainly as though the words were written on his narrow, contracted forehead. He was generally dressed in a seedy suit of black, plentifully clay bedaubed, and said his name was Donnithorne, though his general cognomen amongst the diggers was "Sexton," often qualified by an adjective more forcible than elegant to ears polite. In nature he seemed decidedly genial, had a word for everybody, and was ready to take a drink with any one, though I must confess that I never saw him stand anything in return. It was this amiable little weakness of his that enabled me so easily to gain his friendship; and as whenever I met him I offered to shout, I had numerous opportunities of studying his character, and of pumping him with advantage.

It was about a month after the imbibing of our first friendly nobbler that I one day met Jimmy Donnithorne in the street of the township. A pretty spectacle he presented. His left leg was bandaged up, his right arm was in a sling, and his face looked at least a yard longer than usual, which is saying a good deal. He walked with a crutch, and his old blackened tin billy hung from his belt.

"Why, Jimmy, what the deuce is up?" I exclaimed, upon meeting him in this plight.

"Oh, Mr. Brooke, a sad accident. 'Man proposes, but God disposes,' you know. Here am I with a crushed foot and a broken arm, just as I had a stroke of luck too. Oh dear! oh dear!"

I strove to the best of my power to soothe the sufferer, and assisted him into a neighbouring shanty, where I got him into a private room at the back, ordered brandies hot for two, and pressed him to narrate his adventures.

"Ah, Mr. Brooke, it's an unlucky man I am. Here I'm laid up for a good six months, and the most splendid hole I ever worked lost to me. Alas! what shall I do?" And he groaned aloud in his distress.

"How did you meet with such an accident?" I asked.

"The earth fell in, man. I suppose the ground was loosened by the rains, and I had neglected to prop up the sides of the hole. 'Twas a wonder that I was not killed on the spot, or else buried alive beneath the refuse, it was indeed. As it happened, I was just able to limp out of the shaft and crawl to the doctor, who, as you know, lives close by, and he says that I shall be unfit for work for at least six months."

"'Pon my honour, Jimmy, I'm very sorry," I remarked, assuming an expression of commiseration.

"Sorry! I'm *mad*, my friend. But it's the loss of the precious gold that grieves me, even more than does the bodily pains. Such a find! Oh, what an unlucky dog I am!"

"I don't exactly understand you, Jimmy," said I.

The wounded digger cast upon me a glance of pity, doubtless at my stupidity, and screwing round his head over his left shoulder, winked his left eye, and muttered, "Look in my billy, mate; that'll answer you."

I raised the lid as desired, and saw at the bottom of the billy eight or nine nuggets of gold.

"Take 'em up and look at 'em," said Jimmy.

I readily did so. They were nuggets, sure enough. The largest was about the size of a walnut, the smallest somewhat bigger than a broad bean.

"Mate, you're in luck," I observed, replacing the bits of gold at the bottom of the billy.

"Luck do you call it?" he growled. "Why, I had just discovered a pocketful of golden nuggets, some as big as little pears, but I'd only just picked up these haphazard from the lot when the earth fell in and buried it all again, nearly killing me into the bargain."

"What a pity you are so badly hurt, Donnithorne. You must look out for a mate now, and divide all finds with him," I said.

"Mate? Not I! I am so badly hurt that I must manage to get to town and have more skilful medical attendance than that of the drunken stupid doctor here. I must try and sell my hole, that's what I must do. A mate might rob me whilst I was away."

"And what would you take for the hole?"

"A hundred and fifty pounds down on the nail, and not a penny less. There is more than that amount of gold in the pocket from which I got this. It would not take a week to shovel out the landslip."

I began to smell a rat. I had suspicions that Master Jimmy was acting a part with me, but I replied innocently, "Well, Donnithorne, perhaps that would be your best plan. I would buy your claim myself had I but the blunt to do so; as it is, however, I will, if you will lend me one of the smallest of your nuggets, try and get you a purchaser, you giving me five per cent. on the purchase money if I introduce a deal."

"Done, mate," responded the digger, grasping my hand. "You see I'm unable to move about much, and so might miss a chance of a good bargain. Take one of the nuggets, big or little, and then just help me into the bar, for I might do a stroke of business with a stray customer of Mother Reece's."



I did as he requested, selected the second largest nugget amongst his selection, transferred it to my pocket, helped him on to his feet, or rather his foot and crutch, amidst many groans and contortions of countenance, as though the movement caused him acute anguish, and then assisted him into the bar, where I propped him up against the counter, ordered a drink of brandy hot, which I placed before him, and then bade him good day and quitted the shanty. As I sauntered down the street I could hear his shrill cracked voice re-spinning his yarn to two sturdy diggers who had dropped into the "Rose and Crown" for their morning nobbler.

Before returning to my tent I entered another shanty in order to get a snack of lunch. As I walked into the bar the mail coach from Melbourne rattled up, and hastily securing a copy of *The Argus*, I threw myself into a chair, and was soon quickly devouring its contents. The English mail had just arrived, so that the paper was full of home news, and in a few minutes I was so thoroughly engrossed in the still damp broadsheet, as completely to have forgotten the existence of Jimmy Donnithorne and his nuggets to boot.

Suddenly, however, both were recalled to my mind as my eye rested on the following paragraph:—

"BIRMINGHAM FRAUD ON OUR VICTORIAN GOLD FIELDS.—

*We are in receipt of advice that spurious nuggets and gold dust are being extensively manufactured in Birmingham, for Australian consignees, either to be sold to gold buyers, or else for the purpose of 'peppering' or 'salting' claims for fraudulent sale on the diggings. Some of this spurious metal arrived by the 'Marco Polo,' on Thursday last; and a box full was captured by the police. The strongest acids have been applied, but the metal was so well and strongly gilded as to resist the tests ordinarily applied. We were present at Mr. John Cohen's gold sale yesterday, and saw some of this fictitious compound of the form of shot, in which shape the gold is found with a slight pellicle hanging to it; but it was agreed upon by all present that the imitation was most ingeniously contrived, and when acids were applied by Mr. Hall, a jeweller and purchaser for the banks, the metal was not to be acted*

*upon. The extent to which this nefarious trade is being carried on between Birmingham and the Colonies, and with what degree of success, is unknown, and will remain so until our next advices from England are received. The loss to some will, no doubt, be a very serious matter. This is not a very creditable affair for the workshop of the world to be connected with, but several other frauds are at present being perpetrated in connection with the gold deposits and gold dealing; one of a much more serious character is the following, viz.:—The adulteration of gold with twenty per cent. of copper, or as it was stated in evidence at the Police Court in Bendigo on Wednesday last, with Muntz metal."*

I had no sooner concluded the perusal of this paragraph, than I felt a firm conviction that worthy Jimmy Donnithorne's nuggets were no other than spurious Birmingham compound, that his having found them in his hole was all a hoax, and that his smashed foot and broken arm was a trick got up to enable him to sell a worthless claim at a high price. I at once started for my tent, where I subjected the little nugget in my possession to nitric acid, and then to aquafortis, but to my chagrin it defied both tests. I was, however, unchanged in my impression by this, and I determined that very day to start for Melbourne, and submit it to the most skilful chemists in the city; when, if its worthlessness was discoverable, I would obtain a warrant and return and arrest Mr. Donnithorne at once.

First of all, I resolved to call on the doctor to whose surgery Donnithorne said he had crawled after his accident. I did so, and found the surgeon at home. Upon asking him whether upon a certain night a man with a smashed foot and a broken arm had called upon him, he told me point blank that he had not attended a patient for either kind of accident for more than a month, and that on the night in question the only person who had sought his medical assistance was a woman to have a tooth extracted. I therefore bade him good-day, begging him not to tell any one of my visit, and once more bent my steps homewards, if my little shabby tent on the bleak hillside could be called *home*.

On my road I had to pass down the street of the township,

and when I had nearly reached the further end, I met a man walking wildly along, his hat crushed over his eyes, his step irregular, his face pale and haggard as that of a dying man. By the bright moonlight I recognised John Tucker, the digger who had purchased Donnithorne's duffer claim for £5 15s., the day after his arrival on the Flat.

"Why, 'Tucker, what's the matter?" I asked, laying a hand on his arm as he was about to pass me.

The man started, and his face flushed for a moment, then he said, "Oh! it is you, Mr. Brooke."

"Yes, it is I; but you—why, bless my heart, I scarcely knew you."

"Ah! no wonder—no wonder," he murmured abstractedly.

"What, still out of luck? You look regularly down in the mouth," I said.

"Out of work? Yes, and far worse than that: my wife died last night, died of starvation, and I am now looking for her murderer."

"I am sorry to hear *that*, very sorry. But, *starvation*: how did that happen? Surely you could have got work somewhere."

"I tried—I tried, Mr. Brooke. I kept working at that cursed hole of Donnithorne's till I got to my last sixpence. Then I tried to get employment from some one else, but I tramped over the diggings day after day without success, nobody would give me a job. I would have left the field, for I could have got plenty of work, at high wages, anywhere in the country; but, by this time, my wife was stricken down with Colonial fever, and could not be moved. I dared not leave her alone in such a place, so still kept looking, hoping, praying for work on the Flat. Well, I never got it, my wife sank day by day, the doctor who attended her gratuitously said that she was dying from want of proper nourishment; last night, at eleven o'clock, she breathed her last. And now, as I said before, I am looking for her murderer."

"Whom you *consider* to be Donnithorne?" I observed.

He nodded assent.

"And what do you mean to do by him?"

"Shoot him down as I would a dog. Don't I owe all my

misery to him? Didn't he cheat me of my money? But for him my wife would not have died, I should not now perhaps be a beggar. No, no, I've sworn to shoot him, and I will."

"Nonsense, Tucker; by that course you will peril your own life. It is not worth while to be sent to the gallows for the mere pleasure of killing such a fellow as Donnithorne. Let the law claim him. If you will promise to forego your revenge for three days, I will promise that by that time he shall be in a prison."

"No, no; I cannot forego my revenge; his punishment must be awarded by *my* hand," muttered the digger between his teeth.

"If such is your resolve, I must arrest you," making a step towards him.

Tucker started, "*You* arrest *me*. Who are you, then?"

"James Brooke, of the detective force."

"Are you in earnest?" he asked.

"I am," I rejoined, sternly.

"Then I promise," he said, with a sigh.

"To prove you are not prevaricating, just lend me that revolver for a few days," I said; for I had caught sight of the stock of a "Colts" sticking out of his pocket.

He essayed to make some excuse, but I was firm, and he gave the weapon up.

"Now, old fellow, cheer up; one day you will thank heaven that I was the means of frustrating your plans this morning," and without another word I left him and soon gained my tent.

Early the following morning I was up and preparing for my departure. I walked away from the Flat on foot, and then struck into the high road and slackened my pace. In a quarter of an hour or so Cobb's mail coach overtook me. I managed to get a seat on the box, and after a pleasant drive of some nine hours we reached Melbourne.

It was too late to transact any business that day, so I went to the theatre and enjoyed myself. Early next forenoon I set to business. I first called on Mr. Hall, the jeweller, and purchaser of gold for the banks, whose name occurred in

the paragraph in *The Argus* that had struck my attention a couple of days previously. He tested my nugget, and after taking no small amount of trouble, to my great delight, found it to be a spurious one.

I took down his depositions to that effect, and then hurried to a police magistrate, from whom I procured a warrant to arrest James Donnithorne, on the charge of "obtaining money under false pretences;" and armed with this authority, I secured a seat in the evening coach, and in a few hours was being whirled back to the Galunga Flat.

After a journey which occupied the whole night, we arrived at our, or rather *my*, destination, for the coach only dropt me in passing.

The sun was just rising over the distant mountain peaks when I reached home. It was five o'clock. I lit my fire, filled my billy with water, and manufactured some damper. Then while it was baking I lit my pipe, and seating myself on a log outside, puffed away in happy contentment, and admired the beauty of the landscape.

Suddenly I observed a man walking rapidly along the flat in an easterly direction. It was rather an early hour for a digger to be astir, but that fact alone did not fix my attention, for though he was too far distant for me to distinguish his features, I knew by his long, irregular stride and gaunt figure, that it was John Tucker.

Another fact that I immediately became aware of was that he was crossing the flat in the direction of Donnithorne's tent. This discovery, however, did not cause me any uneasiness. Strange to say, I trusted the fellow's promise, and concluded that even if he did break it, that as I had his revolver, and knew he could not afford to buy another, the assault would be a mere matter of fisticuffs, from which much mischief was not likely to result, so I patiently waited until my breakfast was ready, made a hearty meal, and then set out for the purpose of arresting my man.

It was about a mile to his tent from my own, and as it was even now only six o'clock, I depended upon capturing him before he was out of bed, for it would be inconsistent with his reputed broken and crushed limbs to be up with the lark.

I therefore sauntered leisurely along, enjoying the beauty of the morning and the deliciously cool southern breeze, until within a couple of hundred yards of my destination, when I heard the noise of two men in angry altercation. The sounds came, without a doubt, from the interior of Donnithorne's tent. Furious oaths and bitter names, then the dull sound of blows, and presently the whole structure shook as though some one had been violently hurled against the ridge pole.

I now hastened my steps, feeling as I ran on whether my revolver and handcuffs were handy to be got at; but before I could gain the tent, two figures reeled out of it. They were both of them locked in each other's grasp, and I recognised at a glance that the combatants were John Tucker and James Donnithorne. The face of the former resembled that of a demon, so disfigured was it by rage and hatred; the latter, no longer a cripple, was, with his disengaged arm (the *broken* one, by-the-bye), raining a shower of blows on his adversary's head and shoulders, which seemed to be no more regarded than if each of them was a descending feather.

"Stop, mate," I shouted, "that man is my prisoner!"

Neither of them heard my words, but continued to writhe, twist, and struggle in their close embrace like two interlaced boa-constrictors. I made no attempt to separate them, but waited until the struggle was over, which I concluded would be as soon as one of the parties was thrown. At length Jimmy Donnithorne seemed to be getting the better of his more fragile antagonist, whose breathing was becoming short and gasping, and whose muscles were beginning to fail him. A sneer curled Donnithorne's lip as he noticed these indications of failing strength; he ceased to grapple his assailant, but with an adroit jerk freed his arms for a moment, and then, like lightning, caught him with both his brawny hands by the throat, which he grasped with such iron pressure that Tucker's face began to grow purple, while his eyes seemed to be starting from their sockets. I now thought it time to interfere, and sprang towards Donnithorne to drag him from his half-strangled foe, but ere I could effect this, Tucker had drawn a knife and stabbed Donnithorne twice in the back.

The latter immediately relaxed his grasp, and muttering, "Oh, my God, I am done for!" fell heavily to the ground.

"What have you done? You have killed him," I said, as I raised the wounded man's head.

The digger did not seem to hear my words, his gaze was riveted with an expression of fiendish hate on the countenance of the dying man. He folded his arms on his chest and said, calmly, "My poor wife is avenged."

I now hastened to examine Donnithorne's wounds. A moment's inspection told me that he had only a few minutes to live. The knife had been plunged into his body up to its haft at each stab; the blood was flowing in torrents, and had already formed a pool around him.

"I will summon aid to carry you to the doctor's," I said.

"No, no, let me die here, I can but live for a few minutes," he said, faintly.

I saw that to insist upon moving him would be needless cruelty, but I bandaged up his wounds in order to keep body and soul together as long as possible, and then asked him if there was anything he would like done after his death.

He seemed to consider for a moment or two, and then looking me in the face, he for the first time recognised me. A puzzled expression crossed his countenance as he said, "I thought that some one called out just now that I was a prisoner. Was it so?"

"Yes, I said so as I came up. I am a police officer. The nugget you gave me the other day I took to Melbourne to be tested; it was found to be spurious, so I obtained a warrant, which I have now in my pocket, for your arrest. But you will presently be before a more mighty, and, I trust, a more merciful tribunal than a police court."

The dying man shuddered, then his glance fell on John Tucker, who still stood in the same attitude, with his stern, remorseless gaze fixed on his victim.

"Who are you and why sought you this meeting?" asked the dying man, who had evidently forgotten the digger's countenance.

"Who am I, rascal? why, I am the man you cheated out of his every penny in return for a worthless claim; who owes

his own ruin and his wife's death to you. If you would know the name of the man who has wreaked a righteous judgment on you, it is John Tucker."

"Who? who?" cried the dying man, raising himself upon his elbow and gazing wildly at his assassin's face. "Say that name again, it cannot be possible!"

"What can't be possible?" muttered the other. "If you mean my name, why, it is possible, for I am John Tucker!"

"My God! then you are my *brother*," ejaculated the other. "My name is Tom Tucker, and my native town is Marazion in Cornwall;" and as he uttered the last word he fell back on the blood-sodden turf a corpse.

A terrible change overspread the countenance of the murderer; the expression of hatred and gratified vengeance that had been imprinted on every feature passed away, and with a look of unutterable agony and despair he flung himself on his knees before the corpse, and with trembling fingers unfastened a long hair guard that encircled the dead man's throat. To the end of this chain was attached a large gold-plated locket. The wretched man opened it, and exclaiming, "It's my mother's portrait; his words are true then, and I am a second Cain," he fell back insensible.

By this time we had a small crowd around us. Two or three sturdy diggers, by my directions, carried the corpse to the doctor's, for the purpose of a post-mortem examination; though, of course, such a proceeding would be a mere matter of form.

I now turned my attention to the unconscious assassin who in about ten minutes began to show signs of returning reason. When he had fully regained his senses I clapped the handcuffs on him, and took him to my own tent. He was very quiet and docile, his spirit seemed to be completely crushed. When we got to the tent he asked for a drink of water, and after he had drunk it he said impressively, "I *should* have thanked Heaven if I had taken your advice the other day, Mr Brooke."

I made no reply. What consolation could I give under such circumstances?

The finding on the inquest was, of course, one of "wilful



murder," and that same evening I started with my prisoner for Melbourne.

He was not very communicative on the journey, he seemed to be sunk in a sort of lethargy of agonized despair; but yet I gathered from him the following facts,—namely, that his brother had quitted England at twenty years of age, and when John was only ten years old, therefore the non-recognition on each side was very natural. When Donnithorne, or rather, the elder Tucker, sold his duffer claim for £5 15s., he never troubled to inquire the purchaser's name, and so was unconscious that he was cheating his own kith and kin, until he learnt it from the lips of the fratricide. As for John, he did not even know whether or not his brother had quitted the Colony.

The fratricide was tried at the following criminal sittings at Melbourne; but the bill for murder being thrown out by the grand jury, he was merely arraigned for "manslaughter," of which he was found guilty, with a strong recommendation to mercy, on account of the excitement he was labouring under at the time, and the painful circumstances that occasioned it. He was condemned to twelve years' penal servitude; which sentence, by-the-bye, terminated nearly twelve months ago, and my readers may perhaps be glad to learn that on his release from captivity he returned to England a truly penitent man, and that he is now the sole stay and comfort of his aged father and mother.

About a month after the fatal conflict of the two brothers, I had the good fortune to make a regular raid amongst the sellers of dummy claims and spurious gold on the Galunga Flat. I was the instrument of bringing some nine or ten of them to justice; but not before many innocent persons had been victimized, and much injury inflicted on those who could hardly afford to be chiselled of perhaps their last sovereign or two. Poverty is a sad thing everywhere, but in no spot is it so hard and difficult to bear and struggle with as on a gold-field, where the necessities of life are so exorbitantly dear, and selfishness the prevailing characteristic of the population. Perhaps, also, there is no place on earth where poverty is so frequently to be met with, even absolute want.

To most people at a distance there appears some romance in gold-digging; they are excited with the idea that they may kick up a stone and find twenty pounds of gold under it, and cannot imagine how people can refrain from seizing a pick and breaking every piece of quartz they pass, to see if there is another monster nugget in it; but this is all a delusion. Gold-digging is a real downright matter-of-fact trade; in so many hours of common labourer's work, so much gold; in so many buckets of earth, so many ounces; and when once a man is amongst the diggers, he feels no more inclination to take a pick in his hand for the chance of what he may turn up, than he would to enter upon the labour of English navvies, whose allowance is three cubic yards per day. The labour is always great, and sometimes exceedingly so, and a great many fail altogether, and either go to the wall or become fossickers, cheats, loafers, and adventurers. As to salting claims, I have little doubt in my own mind that many of the Münchausen holes, out of which the £5,000 and £7,000 were so readily shovelled up at Mount Alexander in a few days, were got up in such a way and for similar purposes. Many knowing people, at the time, did not hesitate to assert that the wonderful finds that the Governor, in perfect good faith on *his* part, reported to the Home Government, in the early days of the gold fever, were prepared by interested parties.

## A TALE OF A SKULL.

ON every digger's licence at Galunga there was notified the strict prohibition against sinking holes upon any road, or of cutting up the roads through the diggings in any manner. This regulation was not only necessary for the preservation of the roads, but even more so for the security of human life. Yet it was almost totally disregarded, and wherever gold was to be got, the diggers cut up the roads, without the slightest regard either to the convenience of the public or its safety. The roads through the diggings were, in fact, regularly undermined, cut up, and obstructed; and the unfortunate draymen, and all who had to travel over them, sought in bewilderment to find a passage across the heaps and hollows. In innumerable places in all the diggings there were pits along the sides of the roads—even *in* the roads—of various depths, of from ten to one hundred feet, gaping, without the slightest protection, for any traveller in the dark to plunge into. The reader may be astonished at this disregard of human life, but the fact is, that amid the chaos of adventurers of all countries, rushing madly from every corner of the globe to render themselves wealthy, life, as may be supposed, was held wonderfully cheap. Who was likely to care for any one but himself? The number of unrecorded dead who were discovered and cast in hastily dug graves, too frequently without any one knowing anything about them, was truly frightful. While I was encamped at these diggings, instances occurred of people entering a tent, and finding a solitary man in the last moments of life, without a friend near, or any means of help. Probably he had lain for days, or even

weeks, amid the vast multitude, unable to raise hand or foot, or cry for aid to those who, eager in their quest of gold, were ever passing or repassing a few steps from him. Others, again, were found in such a situation with every sign of abject want around them, and not the slightest clue whereby to discover who they were or whence they came. Out of hundreds of thousands of diggers, English and foreign, how many might have had friends who would have given their own lives to learn news of the absent ones! But any news of them they will now never obtain, for they lie either in those nameless graves, or in the deep road-side shafts now long since deserted, and their sides fallen in, burying their victims under many tons of clay and earth. Yes, many a poor fellow, without doubt, has met a horrible fate thus; many a fleshless skeleton lies at the bottom of those terrible man-traps whose fate must ever remain a mystery.

I was one day chatting with two or three diggers at Old Brown's store, on the Galunga diggings, when a man whom I knew very well came in to buy a pound of candles. There was something so strange about his appearance that I could not help staring at him in mute surprise. I had not seen him for two or three days, and when I last beheld him he was as burly, red-faced, jovial a looking fellow as any on the flat. Now he was thin, haggard, and lantern-jawed, with a face as pale as a corpse, and even his hair and whiskers, which had been of a glossy black, were thickly sprinkled with grey.

"How d'ye do, Mitchell?" said the man, nodding to me as he entered.

(Mitchell was then my *nom de guerre*, for as yet it was known but to very few that I was in the force.)

"Pretty well, thank ye, mate. How's yourself? You look down in the mouth. Have you hit upon a good claim, or seen a ghost?—which?"

"I've hit upon a claim *and* seen a ghost, or something worse. Come along with me directly, and I will tell you of something curious," answered the man; and without another word he proceeded to make his purchases.

While he is doing so let me try and picture to the reader

the general appearance of a store at the diggings in the year 1853. The one we were in was a fair sample of its class. It was a large tent, oblong in shape, and in it everything required by a digger or a digger's wife or family could be obtained,—that is to say, if the wherewithal to purchase was at hand,—from barley-sugar to sardines and potted salmon, from pickled onions to Bass's pale ale, from ankle jack-boots to a sou'-wester, from a pair of stays to a cradle, and every requisite for mining, from a pick to a needle. But the confusion, the noise, the medley! What a scene for a Regent Street shopwalker! Here hang a couple of red herrings dripping into a bag of sugar, and a heap of tallow candles lying amid a box of raisins. There a bundle of gay-coloured ribbons crushed beneath two unwashed tumblers and a half-finished bottle of stout. Cheese and salt fish, bread and blacking, pork, yellow soap, and currants, saddles and frocks, green veils and blue serge shirts, wideawakes and shovels, baby linen and camphine lamps, all heaped indiscriminately together, added to which there are frequently children squalling, men swearing, storekeeper sulking, and last, though by no means least, women's tongues going nineteen to the dozen.

The digger bought a few articles, crammed some into his pockets, stuck others under his arm, and beckoned to me to follow him. So nodding to the other loiterers, I joined him on the outside.

"Come with me," said he. "I've got a sick wife, so I must go straight home, but the track is not much out of your road, and we can talk as we go on."

"All right, mate," I replied. "But you look ill yourself. What the deuce has come over you?"

"That's just what I'm about to tell you, and as it's a long yarn I'll begin at once. I've not told it to a soul yet, and thought I wouldn't till I'd asked your opinion on the matter. It's a secret that had better, perhaps, be kept close."

"Well, Bob, begin, for I'm all impatience to hear it."

"May be, then, you've missed me for a few days?"

I confessed that I had done so.

"It's uncommon lucky for me that I wasn't missed alto-

gether. I tumbled down a fifteen fathom shaft last Saturday night whilst coming home rather groggy from Neilson's shanty, and didn't get hauled up until yesterday."

"By Jove! yesterday was Tuesday,—three days. Why, you must have been nearly starved, man."

"So I was, but the miracle is that I was not killed. My life was saved by falling on the body of a putrid horse, so that I came down soft like, but by George the smell was frightful! How I did halloo all the Sunday! but 'twas no use; not a soul heard me, and on the Monday I was equally unsuccessful. On Tuesday I was too weak to cry out much, but just as 'twas getting dark I heard two men walking just by the mouth of the shaft, so I gathered all my strength for a desperate cooée,\* and thank God I was heard. They got a rope and somehow hauled me up, more dead than alive, I can tell you, and carried me home to my tent, where I found my wife stricken down by Colonial fever, brought on no doubt by her anxiety regarding me. By Jove! when my own children looked at me they did not know me!"

"I scarcely wonder at that, Bob; I hardly knew you myself," I rejoined, seeing that he paused for me to make some observation.

"Didn't you, now? Well, do you fancy that what I've already told you is all that befell me in that cursed hole?"

"I don't know, but from your manner I imagine you've something more to tell," I rejoined.

"And so I have, mate. Listen. There's been a foul murder committed, and the evidences of it are now at the bottom of that pit."

"The pit you fell into?"

"Yes."

My professional interest was at once aroused, and I demanded eagerly, "How do you know this?"

"Why, while I was groping about down there in the dark, my hand came against something hard and round like a ball, but full of holes it seemed to be. I tried hard to discover what it was, and at last, by feel more than sight, made it out

\* A peculiar halloo, that can be heard for a great distance.

to be a skull—a human skull. I could feel the holes where the eyes had been, the nostrils, the mouth ; my fingers even fumbled against a tooth or two, all loose and rattling. Warn't that a pleasant discovery ?”

“ Well, 'twas rather dismal, mate ; but all this does not show that any murder has been committed. The man might have fallen in by accident, as you did, then died of starvation, as you might have done, and then the rats and other vermin perhaps picked the flesh from his face, and left his skull to frighten you.”

“ You won't think so when I have finished my yarn, for just over the left eye there was another hole. Ah, I see you start now ! This hole was a slit of about an inch long, and may be the eighth part of an inch wide ; in fact, just such a slit as a Congress knife would make in a fellow's skull, and I guess that was what done it.”

“ Where was the fellow's body ? You only mention the skull, Bob.”

“ Where his body was I can't guess—not in that hole, I'll take my Davy.”

“ Did you search ?”

“ Yes, I did, thoroughly, but not even a bone was there, only the skull.”

“ That is a pity,” I muttered to myself ; “ additional evidence would be valuable.”

“ What do you think of this, then ?” said Bob, after a pause, and plunging his hand into his trousers pocket, he pulled out a bowie knife, and handed it to me with a grim smile.

I clutched the knife eagerly ; it afforded one of the links of evidence that I wanted. Stopping suddenly in my walk, I closely examined it. It was a kind of weapon known in America as a Congress knife : the hilt was of German silver, the blade might have been some six inches in length ; it was very rusty, but half a glance showed me that the rust was of two kinds. Near the hilt the light iron-mould hue was that of damp, but from the point to about three inches up the blade the dark brown, almost black stains, were plainly the rust of blood. On one side the blade I could distinguish

an eagle, with the motto, "*Never draw me without reason, nor sheath me without honour*," stamped in the steel.

"This is a most valuable find, Bob," I said, slapping my companion on the back; "but I suppose that the skull is still in the shaft?"

"It is; I didn't care to bring it up with me. Don't you think we ought to inform the police before we do anything further?" observed the digger.

"Bob, I'll tell you a secret; we've been acquaintances now for some time, and I think I can depend upon you. I am one of the force, and I'm here on special duty, so you see there's no need to inform any one else."

"The deuce you are!" exclaimed Bob, starting, and then looking at me keenly to see whether I was in jest. He seemed satisfied with his inspection, however, and said drily, "Well, you might have told a fellow of this before; you've been rather close with a friend, I think."

"Never mind that, old boy; I dare say I should have told you before long, even if it had not been for this affair. But to return to business. We must manage to get that skull above ground, and that speedily, too. Will you aid me?"

"Oh yes, I don't mind."

"What do you say to to-night, then, for a try?"

"I'm willing; but what about a rope?"

"I'll get both rope and candle," I rejoined. "Remember, there's money to be earned, as well as justice to be meted out. At what time will you join me, and where?"

"I will call for you at your tent at about eleven o'clock; the hole is no great way from your hang-out. We shall have finished the job before midnight, I reckon."

We had now arrived close up to Bob's tent, and cautioning him not to tell a soul what had happened, not even his own wife, I took my leave of him and walked away.

Many a brown study I fell into that day, and many a pipe of Barrett's twist did I smoke to clear my faculties and aid me in the solving of the skull enigma. In vain, however, did I trouble my brain; the affair as yet seemed inexplicable, but I still smoked and thought on, until night brought eleven o'clock and my friend Bob.



"I am pretty punctual, you see," said he.

"Yes, I can't blame you on that score, mate; and here are rope and candles. We will have a dram of rum, and then be off."

I produced a bottle and a couple of tin cups as I spoke, and we took our drinks in silence. We then set out on our adventure.

We had only a mile to walk before we got to the scene of operations, so that in about twenty minutes after leaving my tent, we stood alongside the deserted shaft; and while Bob was adjusting his rope around the barrel of the windlass, and making other preparations for a descent, I took a narrow inspection of the locality, which the bright starlight enabled me to do.

Although not far removed from the centre of the gold-field, this hole was, nevertheless, at least three hundred yards distant from any other, while at about forty-five or fifty yards from it stood a tent, which was also about three hundred yards distant from any other tent. The tent in question was pitched in the rear of the heaps of earth thrown up in digging the shaft, so that, standing as we were at the mouth of the shaft, we could only just see the top of it. These simple facts struck me as peculiar. "Without doubt," I thought, "that tent is occupied by the man who dug this shaft, for a digger would naturally fix his tent as close to the locality where he was working as possible, but this hole has evidently been for some time abandoned. How is it, then, that he has not marked out a fresh claim, and commenced digging somewhere else, and, as a natural consequence, removed himself and tent to his new scene of operations?"

I was unable to answer these mental queries, but I could not help fancying that the mystery of the skull was hidden within that neighbouring tent.

By this time Bob Mason was ready for a descent; he had secured and wound the rope over the barrel, and tied a coil of the other end around his middle, so I stood by the windlass and began to lower him.

By George, how that old rusty windlass did creak; but as it did not commence doing so until Bob was halfway down,

it was as well to lower him the other half as to draw him up again. I was, however, terribly afraid that the inmate of the tent would be alarmed by the noise, and if he had been, and there was any crime to conceal, he might pop me off with his revolver and then throw me into the hole; leaving my mate a second chance of starving to death by cutting the rope, or else shoot him down at his leisure, as coolly as he would fire at a rat in a trap.

The deuce of it was, I had not a weapon of any kind with me.

As luck would have it, however, the fellow was either away in the township, or else slept as man never slept before, for Bob got to the bottom of the hole all right, and the creaky old windlass ceased its uproar. I looked down into the obscure depth below me, and saw the digger strike a match, light a candle, and look around him narrowly on every side. At length I saw the light fall on the identical skull he was in search of. He perceived it at the same instant, picked it up from the damp humid earth, and held it aloft in his hand with an air of triumph. I nodded to signify approval, and he then placed it inside his jumper, and gave me a signal to draw him up.

"Are both your hands at liberty, Bob?" I asked in a low tone, for a whisper is almost audible from the top to the bottom of a shaft.

"Yes, quite."

"Then I shall just secure the rope to the upright, and you must ascend hand over hand."

I did not explain my reason for so doing, but doubtlessly he guessed it. Quickly shifting the rope from the barrel to one of the uprights of the framework, and making it secure, I let him clamber to the surface as best he could. A few minutes later he stood by my side. We then drew up the rope, coiled it, and without interchanging a word, retraced our steps to my tent, which we soon reached. I looked at my watch, and as Mason had predicted, we had finished our work before midnight, for it was just ten minutes to twelve.

We now had out the rum bottle again, and lighting our pipes, prepared to enjoy ourselves.

"Whose tent is that, Bob, close to the shaft?" I asked.

"Oh, I know; a fellow called Adams hangs out there."

"Don't you fancy it's a strange thing that he never heard your shouts during those three days and nights that you were in the hole?" I remarked, drily.

"So it was, very odd; living so close by as he did, too; but I believe he is deaf. I know that he used to complain of being so when he was a mate of mine at Gardiner's Creek, some two years ago."

"Does he know of your adventure in that shaft, or anything of what you saw there?"

"Oh no; I have not seen him since. You are the only man I have told of the skull business, and the only one I shall tell."

"That's right, Bob; a still tongue makes a wise head, you know. In less than a month, ay, perhaps in less than a week, all the flat may know of it. It seems to me this fellow Adams is a queer one. What's he doing now? I don't see any sign of another hole about his tent, and that old shaft has long since been deserted. Has he given up digging?"

"Not he, he's got a claim and has sunk a hole quite at the other end of the flat; he works in it every day, too, and has lately turned up some tidy nuggets there. Why, bless your heart, his claim is only half a stonethrow from mine," said Mason.

"Then why on earth don't he pitch his tent close to his new hole, instead of leaving it by the deserted one? He has a two-mile walk every day to and from work."

"I don't know; he's a rum cove altogether, a mighty savage chap too. He was in California some time, and his revolver and knife are as ready as his tongue,—a little more so, in fact; for Jack Adams prefers biting to barking any day, I can tell you."

I now changed the conversation to other subjects, and shortly after Bob Mason got up to go home, leaving the skull behind him.

After he had gone, I immediately set to work to examine my treasure by the aid of a tallow dip stuck in a ginger-beer

bottle. The skull was just like any other skull, for the flesh had been all stripped off it long ago by rats and other vermin, but there was the hole over the left eye socket, just as Mason had described. I saw that it was knife-work at once, and going to my box I rummaged up the rusty old bowie knife that Mason had given me the day before, and thrust it into the incision. It fitted it exactly; a fool could not have doubted but that that knife and that head had been previously acquainted.

All this was very satisfactory, so far as it went, but the next and most difficult thing of all was to find the murderer, and to bring the crime home to him. I had already, as before observed, strong suspicions against Mr. Jack Adams; and I passed another sleepless night in laying schemes whereby to bring him within my toils, for it was broad daylight before I had concocted a sufficiently practicable plot to stand any chance of success.

I first of all set about forming Adams's acquaintance, which I managed to do the following day at the "Olive Leaf" shanty at knock-off hour, and before a week had expired sundry drinks had, in a way, cemented it, and a sort of friendship arose between us.

One Sunday afternoon I strolled carelessly past the deserted hole and Adams's tent, calmly smoking my pipe and with my hands in my pockets, wearing the air of a man who is lazily taking his constitutional, and wanders as his nose or fancy leads him. All at once I heard a gruff voice halloo out, "Hoy! hoy, Mitchell!" I glanced round and pretended to look surprised, as my eyes fell on the burly form of Jack Adams lying on the ground outside his tent, his hands under his head and a short black pipe between his teeth.

"Halloo, is that you, Adams? So you hang out here, do you! Why, man alive, I thought you were fixed up by O'Neil's shanty, on the other side of the flat," I said, with an air of surprise, as I turned back and sat, or rather squatted down by his side.

"Oh no, I ain't, nor never was; what made you think that?"

"Why, I could have sworn that as I passed along the

ridge there the other morning I saw you at work close by."

"Yes, I dare say you did ; I've a hole there."

"There?" I exclaimed, in accents of assumed surprise.

"Why on earth don't you pitch your tent there, then?"

I saw that the suddenness of the question had taken him aback ; but after a draw from his pipe he said, "Oh, I don't like the neighbourhood there, I prefer this place."

The reason was a poor one, for the part of the diggings where he was now located, and which he pretended to prefer, was marshy, unhealthy, very gloomy ; and I knew that the water, which was very good on the other side, was here impregnated with mineral substances, and most offensive to the taste.

"Ah, you may *like* it best, for you've more elbow-room here, I grant ; but ain't you afraid of having your hole plundered at night, and you so far away from it?"

"Oh no, not I. They know me, they do, and I guess that most of them do vally their skins too much to try it on with Jack Adams," said the fellow, with an oath too horrible to record.

I had not won much ground on that tack, so, after a few minutes' silent puffing at my pipe, I said carelessly, nodding towards the neighbouring shaft, "Did you ever work that claim, mate?"

"Yes, *rather* ; Bill Taylor and I was mates there a twelve-month agone, and a tidy bit we made out of it too."

"Bill Taylor ! heavens ! I knew Bill Taylor well in England. Where is he now ? By Jove, I'm so glad I began to talk about that hole. How delighted I shall be to see the old fellow !" I exclaimed, in excited tones. It is needless to confess that I never heard the name before in my life.

I saw that I had caught Adams for a second time on the ground-hop. I perceived that his mahogany-tinted countenance actually grew pale, and his voice had lost its loud blustering tones, as he said, "I'm afraid you never will clap eyes on that coon, for the day after we had our best find he said he would have a holiday, so he took his gun and went

into the bush to shoot parrots. I never saw him afterwards ; I dare say he lost his way and died of hunger."

It was not likely that I swallowed this cock-and-bull story, but of course I pretended to, and expressed abundance of sorrow and pity for the fate of poor Bill Taylor ; though at the same time feeling pretty sure that I had his skull at home in my tent, and that his body was lying, not in the bush, but snugly buried under the turf in a spot not very remote from where I now sat ; in fact, I shrewdly conjectured that his grave was dug inside Jack Adams' very tent.

I had done enough pumping for one day, for I did not want to awaken any suspicions in the breast of my new friend, so we chatted for some time on various subjects, and then I rose and took my leave.

I suffered three days to pass before I came across Adams again. This time I watched him into a shanty, and walking in about five minutes later, recognised him as though accidentally, and asked him to have a wet. Master Jack readily assented, and I soon contrived to get him into a sufficient state of jollity to illustrate the proverb, "When the wine's in the wit's out." I then enticed him away, telling him that he had had enough, got him outside, and volunteered to walk part of the way home with him.

Adams was not drunk—had he been so it would not have suited my views,—but he had taken just enough to dissipate his usual caution, and I felt sure that he would not be on his guard when replying to my questions.

For some minutes I walked by his side in silence ; then I said, carelessly, "How long ago is it since you worked the old shaft by your tent, Jack?"

"Not since Bill Taylor's death, mate ; or at least, I mean to say, 'twas about a week after he lost himself that I gave it up."

I noticed the clumsy correction, but took no heed of it.

"Why did you abandon it, mate? Didn't it pay for working?"

"Not a bit of it, we was clean down on the rock ; there ain't a bit of gold left in the hole."

This statement did not exactly correspond with his boasting on the previous Sunday afternoon of the "tidy lot of gold" himself and mate had got out of the hole a day or two before the final disappearance of the latter; so I said, "I am sure, mate, you overlooked something, for that old shaft holds a secret that no one on the flat knows about," I said, in slow, impressive tones, looking him full in the face as I spoke.

By George! the expression of Adams's face at that moment was a treat to witness. He turned as pale as death, his eyes seemed to be starting out of his head, his legs shook under him, as he exclaimed, "A secret! what do you mean? There's no secret there. Hang it, man, what secret should I have?"

"You have! Come, I like that. I never supposed that *you* had it, Adams, or you'd be working there again with a will."

"Then what on earth do you mean? Don't talk riddles, man, for I'm clumsy at guessing them," said he, half angrily, and yet considerably reassured.

"Well, then, Jack, I mean this, that I've examined the dip of the land and other things, and I've come to the conclusion that that hole is not half worked out yet. I meant to double on you and jump\* it, but as you look upon it as your own like, I couldn't bring myself to do such a shabby trick, particularly as we've become friends, so I propose that we work it as mates. You will find it a profitable spec, I feel sure."

I spoke with such an air of candour that Adams never doubted my sincerity for a moment, but then, by every argument in his power, he sought to persuade me out of my assumed belief. It was quite amusing to listen to him. Doubtless he would not have gone down into that hole again for the world; and for any one else to do so would have been still worse, for the discovery of the skull could not but cause ugly queries to arise, which might somehow implicate him in the matter. His protestations and vocifera-

\* Take possession of it.

tions more than ever confirmed my previous convictions; and when I parted from him I lost no time in obtaining an interview with the proper authorities, explaining matters to them, and procuring a warrant to arrest Jack Adams "for the murder of one William Taylor."

I was away from the flat a whole day effecting this, and when I got back to my tent I was too tired to do anything but turn in and get a sleep.

The following day, however, at knock-off hour, I came across my man, and assuming a blithe tone, I told him that I had had a lucky find, and to commemorate the occasion had got sundry bottles of grog and ale, a cheese, and other good cheer, from the "Magnolia," and invited him to come into my tent and help to keep it up.

Adams readily assented—he was not the one to decline an offer to shout from any one—and we went into the tent together.

On the way I adroitly picked his pocket of his heavy clasp-knife, and transferred it to my own.

The reader will naturally imagine that I did this in order to prevent his drawing it and doing me a mischief when I arrested him, but such an idea as this never crossed my mind. I had another object in view, which was to bring the crime still closer home to him.

Well, we entered the tent, and I put bottles, bread, cheese, meat, and other things on the inverted cask that served me for a table, and bade Master Jack sit down and partake.

Drawing my clasp-knife from my pocket (table-knives and forks were not often amongst the household furniture of a digger), I began helping myself, and bid my companion do the same, and not to stand upon ceremony.

Adams growled assent, and dived his hand into his pocket for his knife. No, it was not in that one; and he tried the others with equal ill-success. "Dang it, I've left my tater-scraper at home, I reckon," he said at length.

"What, lost your knife?" I asked.

"Why, it looks like it, mate," he responded.

"Oh, never mind, I can lend you one, Jack," said I; and



as I spoke I drew from out my breeches pocket the rusty Congress knife that had been found in the old shaft, and handed it to him.

No sooner did his gaze rest upon that accusing steel than his face grew white as a sheet, his eyes seemed glaring out of his head with horror, his teeth clattered like a shaken dice-box. He staggered to his feet, though his legs nearly refused to support him, and stammered out, "That knife—where did you get that knife from?"

"Where you threw it, rascal. I arrest you, John Adams, for the murder of your mate, William Taylor."

"Arrest me? Who are *you*, then?" he asked, in a confused tone.

"I am detective Brooke, of the Melbourne force," I answered, as I drew the handcuffs from my pocket, and sprang upon him.

I fancied that the fellow was too frightened to offer any resistance, but I was mistaken. His panic had been but momentary, and he now displayed a strong objection to the irons. A tremendous blow, delivered straight from the shoulder, and which I only guarded just in time, showed me that I had met more than my match. He was greatly my superior in weight and strength, and I was well aware that unless aid arrived I should fight the losing game.

I had provided for this contingency, for all this time Bob Mason, armed with a heavy sprig of shillelah, had been waiting outside the tent, ready to put in an appearance directly such a step was expedient. Seeing that we had come to actual fisticuffs, and that Jacky Adams was getting the better of me, he rushed in, and with a blow of his cudgel brought the murderer to the ground.

"Now, then, on with the bracelets. Quick! the villain's stunned!" he said.

I was about to do so, when I discovered that through some carelessness the key had fallen out. "Keep your eye on him while I find the key," I whispered, and began to hunt about on the ground for it, fancying it had dropped in the struggle.

Mason stood over the prostrate Adams with his stick

raised, but believing him to be insensible, his eyes wandered around to aid me in discovering the lost key. Adams, who had only been shamming that he was stunned, saw all this through his half-closed eyes, and suddenly grasping Bob Mason by the leg, threw him over on his back in a twinkling; and springing to his feet just as I made a rush at him, sent me staggering against the ridge pole with a back-handed blow on the chest, and then seizing the stick out of Mason's relaxed grasp, he sprang over him and darted out of the tent.

All this was done like a flash of lightning; the next instant Mason was on his feet, and we were gazing into each other's faces like two asses as we were.

"After him, mate!" I shouted, pulling two revolvers from my box, and deeply regretting that I had not had one by me when I handed Adams the rusty knife. I gave one of them to Bob, stuck the other in my own belt, and we dashed out of the tent in pursuit.

Adams was already at least a hundred yards in advance; his hat was gone, his long uncombed hair streamed in the wind; he was running for his life, and heading for the extreme right of the flat in the direction of his own tent. I immediately concluded that once there he would seize his pistols, stand at bay, and show fight.

This part of the flat was thinly peopled of an evening, so that our race was not impeded by any one. The few who did perceive us only stared, probably thinking that we were running for a bet.

The reader may perhaps wonder that we did not hail any one to stop him, but there were so many roughs on the flat, that had we done so we might have won an enemy the more instead of a friend; and then we neither of us cared for the story to get abroad of how an unarmed man had thrashed and escaped from two armed ones, for my handcuffs ought to have been as efficient a weapon at close quarters as Bob's stick. So on and on we went, gradually lessening the distance between pursuers and pursued, until at last, as I had conjectured, we ran him to earth in his own tent.

"Stop, Mason, he has weapons there; let us lie down behind this ridge," I said to my companion, for Adams might have shot both of us down with ease through any holes in the canvas of his tent—and every old tent has such holes—whilst he would be perfectly concealed.

Mason read my thoughts in a moment, and we both lay down behind the steep mound of earth which had been thrown up in digging the shaft. The tent was now about forty yards from us, within easy range of our revolvers, and as we lay there with our fingers on the triggers of our weapons, Adams came boldly out to the door of his tent, and fired at Mason's head, which for a moment was raised above our earthwork.

The aim was a good one, for the bullet passed clean through Bob's hat, grazing his scalp rather sharply in its passage.

Mason ground his teeth with rage as he returned the shot, but his bullet sped about a yard wide of the mark; and in return Adams fired his second barrel, the ball this time ripping up the sleeve of my coat.

Crack went my own revolver in reply, and Adams's pistol arm fell helpless by his side; the leaden messenger had sped right through his shoulder, smashing the bone in its passage.

He was plucky to the backbone, however, and though suffering excruciating torture, he picked up the pistol that had dropped from his nerveless grasp, with his left hand, and blazed away at us again.

It was plain, however, that he had never practised left-hand firing, his bullets flew very wide of the mark, and another shot that passed right through his leg did for him. He again dropped his pistol and threw up his left arm as a signal that he yielded.

Bob Mason and I at once quitted our cover, and rushed upon him, the irons were on his wrists in a trice, and he was completely in our power. Pain and defeat had not conquered his bravado, and he spared neither taunts nor curses.

"Tut, you blockheads, what can an old rusty knife do?

There's many a one like it on the flat," he growled at last.

"When the chemist comes to test the rust on it perhaps he will tell a different tale," I said.

"And what if he does find it's blood? who can swear that I haven't killed a pig or a sheep with it?"

"The microscope will show whether it is the rust of an animal's blood or the rust of a man's blood," I said, solemnly.

"Ye jest—such a thing's impossible," exclaimed Adams, with a stare of stupefied amazement. The expression of low cunning soon returned to his countenance, and he said with a laugh,—

"Ah! ah! ah! and if he does, where is the body? By Jove, where is the body? that will slew you. The body—where is the body, you thundering idiots?"

"Under your feet, just where you now lie, Jack Adams," I said, sternly.

"Man or devil, 'tis false," shouted the digger; but his face had turned white as that of a corpse again, and he was trembling in every limb.

"Bob, take that pick, my man, and let's dig. And I seized a spade as I spoke, and rolling Adams out of the way, we commenced digging just at the spot where the ruffian had thrown himself when we ironed him.

We worked with a will, and in less than ten minutes we had got down a yard. Jack Adams by this time looked like a dead man himself; his braggadocio and bravado had totally disappeared; he shivered and trembled to such an extent as almost to shake the tent.

Suddenly my spade struck against something hollow, at the same instant the point of Bob's pick caught in some obstacle. He dragged it upwards with all his force, and lo! a headless skeleton was exposed to view. Bob's pick had caught in one of the ribs.

At sight of that terrible relic of the departed, Jack Adams uttered a wild cry, and fainted.

The reader may wonder how I became so thoroughly convinced that the body of the murdered man was buried in

that spot. Well, I had several reasons for such a conviction. Firstly, Adams's persistency in keeping his tent pitched so close to the old shaft, which, had there not been a peremptory reason for remaining near, he would naturally have been glad to quit the proximity of. Secondly, a faint musty smell that I had remarked during my previous visits to Adams. And thirdly, because I noticed that when, faint from his wounds, he had sunk to the ground, instead of falling where he had stood, he struggled for at least three yards in order to fall on a particular spot. Adams naturally feared to remove his tent lest the ground it had stood on might be dug up, a most probable thing on a gold-field, and the secret it held be revealed to the world.

Adams was perfectly passive after this discovery, and allowed us to take him off to prison in a spring-cart without the slightest show of resistance. The police magistrate, before whom he was first taken, remanded him to the Criminal Sessions at Melbourne; the day of trial came on, and of course I made sure of a conviction. I was, however, doomed to disappointment, for John Adams was actually acquitted, the jury, after half an hour's consideration, bringing in the verdict "*Not guilty.*" Afterwards he was tried on the second charge, and sentenced to five years' penal servitude for "shooting with intent" at myself and Bob Mason when we attempted to capture him.

Never in my life was I so inclined to sneer at the inability of the criminal law to punish crime as in the present instance. True, the body of the murdered man was not identified, nor could it be proved point-blank that Adams was his murderer. Yet am I convinced that every one in court, one or two obstinate jurymen excepted, felt certain of the fellow's guilt, and were astounded at his acquittal.

As to the operation of the law at the diggings, and its competency to grapple with the crimes of an uncivilized mob, the facts narrated in the above tale will enable the reader to judge; there is no need of discussing the subject logically. When I visited the Californian gold-fields some years previously, life and property were more secure

there than they were during the years 1852 and 1853 at the Victorian diggings. Without law save the law of honour, without restraint except that imposed by fear of summary punishment, which was sure to follow the only crimes cognizable under the new code, those of *stealing* and *murder*, we were comparatively safe. If the "way of the transgressor was hard," it was also speedily terminated. It was the reign of the rifle and the halter. And yet this was a people who had been accustomed to the laws of civilized countries, and who loved order. The principles of a republican government were only adapting themselves to a new and untried emergency. The crime was committed, and proved in the presence of a competent and impartial jury, who were also required to award the punishment. The sentence was pronounced by the alcaid. A grave was dug, the sharp crack of the rifle was heard, the body was buried, and every man proceeded silently to his own work. There was no lawyer's finesse, no twistings and turnings of special pleading, no absurd precedents or legal quibbles, affording the accused a hundred loopholes to escape by, when morally not one in a thousand could doubt his guilt; and yet, during the thirteen months that I remained in the State, I never once heard of a case in which the verdict given under the first system was an unrighteous one, or the punishment inflicted undeserved. But even here a change eventually came. Laws were at last enacted on Californian gold-fields, and the result was that crimes of every kind were soon very prevalent, and the officers of justice were met with the taunts, "Catch me if you can," "Punish me if you dare." Seldom was the criminal captured, and when arrested more seldom was he brought to punishment. There was but one opinion amongst the miners, namely, that the system *without law, but with summary justice*, was *in the state of society which then existed* in California incomparably better and more beneficial to the majority than the system *with such law, but without justice*.

Different diseases require different remedies; different peoples require different forms of government; and laws that are adapted to a great commercial enlightened nation like

England, or to a fully developed colony like Victoria at the present day, will fail to suit the emergencies for which they are required amid the tumult of a gold-field, which is a world within itself, and often one which is infested with a great number of the vilest scoundrels in existence.

## A LEAP FOR LIFE.

IN the August of 1854 I quitted the mounted police force of Victoria, and entered that of New South Wales. I do not know why I took this step ; perhaps it was that yearning after "fresh fields and pastures new" which seems to be an instinct of human nature. Anyhow, one bright spring morning I found myself on board the steamship *Illawarra*, clearing the calm blue waters of Hobson's Bay (the largest harbour in the known world), with Queen's Cliff and Point Nepean some three miles ahead, and beyond them the snow-crested waves of Bass's Straits.

I shall not inflict upon my readers a narrative of my voyage, which if barren in incident was full enough of discomfort and misery. I was a second cabin passenger, and the sea was so rough during the entire voyage, that after tumbling into my bunk when off Cape Patterson, I never emerged from it until, forty-five hours later, we entered Port Jackson bay, and consequently were in calm water.

By Jove, how my bones ached when I did get up ! for my berth had been destitute of bed and bedding, and lying for two days and nights on hard boards, added to the misery of rolling from your left side to your right, and *vice versa*, at every lurch of the ship, is almost sufficient to turn one into a jelly. The eating and drinking, too—ugh ! How terrible an ordeal it is for a seasick man to witness people possessed of ravenous appetites ! Three times a day were the dirty scratched tin plates and cups placed on the oilclothed, tobacco-strewn, beer-ring marked tables ; and two immense tin dishes, one holding a pile of stringy, half-raw beefsteaks, the other an



oniony and oleaginous mess of Irish stew, placed in the centre of the board ; stale loaves of bread being the only adjuncts to this invariable bill of fare. When these horrible meals were disposed of, the refuse was cleared away, greasy, fly-spotted packs of cards were produced, and after a five-minutes' "chop-chop-chop" at "Barrett's twist," or "nigger's toe," pipes were lighted, a cloud of impenetrable smoke obscured the scene, and the only noises that were audible were the "thump, thump, thump" of the screw, the "swish" of the waves against the scuttle window at the side of my head, the bleating of the sheep from above, where a hundred and fifty of them were huddled in a mass on the fore deck, rendering it next to impossible for a steerage passenger to escape from below during the entire voyage, mingled occasionally with the shrill hissing of the steam, words of command bellowed through a speaking-trumpet, and the clatter of the tin and crockery in the steward's pantry ; while nearer still, cries of "Four by cards !" "Clubs is trumps !" "Game and game !" "High, low, and Jack !" "I scores three !" and similar exclamations, mingled with eternal spitting on all sides, and sometimes loud calls for bottled ale and stout (which, by the bye were sold at the rate of half-a-crown a bottle), with the consequent popping of corks ; and last, but by no means least, the continuous groaning of women and screeching of children from the women's cabin, constituted, when combined, as neat a little Babel or Pandemonium as it is possible to conceive.

Never was a poor wretch more glad to get out of jail, mad-house, or purgatory than was I to escape from that detestable cabin. Directly the rolling of the ship ceased I scrambled up on deck, and struggling through the poor penned-up sheep, many of whom had died on the passage and been flung overboard, I ascended the fore-castle, and from thence surveyed the beauty of the surrounding scene.

We had just passed the Heads, which reared their awful heights in our rear like two precipitous walls of iron, surmounted by massive crags that stood aloft like watch-towers guarding the entrance to the most lovely harbour in the world (the Bay of Naples or that of Valetta not excepted),

while eight hundred feet below lay piles of rock, variously tinted with bright red, grey, and brown lichens, and set in wreaths of vivid green boobyalla bushes that lie within the dash of the ceaseless spray.

We rapidly ascended the harbour ; presently the crescent-shaped range formed by the two headlands disappeared astern, and on each side of us rose the steep rocky shore, where rough rocks showed themselves from between the trunks of the gigantic gum trees, while thick bush and scrub commenced from the very edge of the narrow strip of sandy beach, and continued up to the brow of the heights above.

Three more points of the winding shore rounded, and the scene grew more peaceful and homely. White, green-verandahed villas glittered here and there amid the foliage. Graceful, slender young tea trees\* growing up between the massive, mossy old rocks, drooped some of their long sprays of snowy blossoms over the water ; while groups of acacias—their bluish blooming foliage laden with fringed golden clusters, hawthorn-like in fragrance—grew just beyond, waving their scented fronds where the eddying currents of tributary creeks gurgled on to dissolve into their parent stream. The still water through which we steamed was blue as the heavens above, save where the shadow of the dense smoke that rolled from the mouth of our funnel threw a leaden hue across its broad bosom. Around us flocks of sea-birds, with silvery plumage and scarlet legs and feet, added to the joyousness of the scene—either skimming along high above even our fore topmast, or poised for an instant like silver stars, until, one after another, dozens of them would pounce down upon the shoals of fish below.

Point after point, forming a series of apparently land-locked lakes, was rounded. Gradually the villas that dotted the shore became more numerous. Garden Island was passed, so was the round tower on Pinchgut Island. The tall Oyster Bay pines (*Frenela australis*) in the Botanical Gardens rose to our view, towering high above the topmasts of the large frigate that lay at anchor in Woolloomooloo Bay, almost

\* *Septospermum*.

under their shadow. Then we steamed past Government House and Circular Quay, rounded Cockatoo Island, where the convict station is situated, and a few minutes later were alongside Phoenix Wharf, at the base of Sussex Street, and once more, I must confess also to my great satisfaction, the hum and bustle of city life sounded in my ears.

It was about six o'clock in the evening when I landed. I immediately hastened to report myself at head-quarters, where the letters of introduction and commendation from the officers of the Victorian force, of which I was the bearer, had due weight. I was politely requested to attend the following morning at ten o'clock, in order to be sworn in. This I accordingly did; the ceremony was duly performed, and I retired to the barracks to don my new uniform and hold myself ready for orders.

I was destined not to have a long stay in Sydney, for the very morning following my admission into the force I was ordered for out-station duty, and received instructions to start at once, in company with another trooper younger than myself, for a place called Dunewatha, which lay at some distance on the other side of the Blue Mountains, and was a good three days' journey from the metropolis.

It was nine a.m. when we received our orders, and by eleven we were in the saddle and descending Elizabeth Street at a trot. We turned round Hyde Park Corner into Parramatta Street, and in another quarter of an hour the straggling suburbs of the city were left in our rear.

It was a most unpleasant day. A regular brickfielder\* was blowing, and even before we had cleared the town our white shako covers and snowy buckskin breeches were powdered thickly with reddish dust, which the furious north-west wind, hot as the breath of a furnace, blew against our faces with such force as to cause intolerable pain; while the fine gritty sand would penetrate eyes, ears, and nostrils with a persistency anything but agreeable. The thermometer, when we left Sydney, marked 115 degrees in the sun; and as that luminary rose higher and higher in the pale, steel-

\* Hot wind.

grey, cloudless sky, the intensity of its rays became more and more unbearable. I tried to picture the verdant pastures, shady woods, and rippling streams of England, but that rendered the sufferings I endured still more unpalatable.

It was too hot to talk, and my mate was as glum and discontented as myself; and so we slowly trotted along the solitary bush road silently and spectre-like, our poor horses black with sweat, their heads drooped, and their tails as limp as a shirt-collar without starch. Around us the straw-coloured vegetation was unvaried by the slightest tint of green, and the tall white trunks of the gum trees, with their scanty vertical foliage, mingled with sombre peppermint and stringy bark, formed about as dreary a scene as it is possible to imagine.

As to the road we were travelling, they talk of *corduroy* roads in America, but I should like to show a Yankee a mile or two of the one we that day travelled over. Imagine a stony plain, the surface entirely covered with large swampy holes, filled with water, slush, and glutinous mud; then throw into these hollows a number of angular blocks of stone, half concealed by the muddy waters, and let mud and water turn into dust (twelve hours will in New South Wales effect the metamorphosis), and you will have a faint conception of our road. At length the scrub on either side grew less thickly, and we gladly quitted the rugged path for the open country. We had not ridden on for more than a couple of miles, however, congratulating ourselves that we had bidden farewell to dust, if not to heat, when a far greater annoyance than either befell us. This arose from the pertinacious attentions of the sand-flies, which are a kind of midge—small filmy things, like the midges at home, but much more lively, bloodthirsty, and venomous. They were as numerous as the grains of sand in the sterile Iron Bark ranges. They covered the whole ground for miles, and as we advanced would rise up, get on our horses' legs and chests, puncturing them in such a manner that their legs were completely covered in a few minutes with blood. The poor animals of course became quite frantic, not being able to brush them off. It was often no trivial matter to keep one's

seat, owing to their rearing and kicking from the pain. My mate told me in another month the birds would have eaten the midges up; it was only in spring they were so numerous. The effect of the bite on man is much worse than on horses. Wherever they bite, the part swells excessively, and becomes a great livid boil as large as a walnut. He had been bitten on the wrist the preceding spring, when riding on the banks of the Murray. The next day his hand was swelled enormously; it settled into one of those boils which are very sluggish and difficult to cure. It was not well, in fact, for a month, and would not heal till treated with caustic. Another, only a month ago, had bitten his other hand; the venomous puncture had gone exactly through the same process. As a proof of his words, he showed me a scar on each hand, which no doubt would never wear away.

About mid-day we reached a creek, where we watered and bathed our horses, to their great relief, and on whose banks we encamped to eat luncheon. It was a lovely spot; on account of the moisture the grass was green, and adorned with myriad-tinted flowers, while forty miles in our front rose the purple peaks of the Blue Mountains. Close to where we sat grew some grass trees, but only dwarf ones, splendidly in flower. The flower is on a rod of two or three feet high, which rises perpendicularly from the centre of the tree, and surrounds some half a yard of it in the manner of the flower of the club rush, but white, and the florets resemble those of the water tussilago.

During our meal we were terribly persecuted by "jumping ants." They were about half an inch long, and jumped surprisingly. They were great flycatchers, and so far proved themselves our benefactors, but we soon found that it was only one pest giving place to another. These little black flies were, even in this comparatively cool and shady spot, the most impertinent, persevering vermin possible. The moment we produced our meat from our saddle-bags, they covered it. They also managed to settle on our hands and faces, where they raised up blood blisters, and then sucked at them till they burst. The moment the spots were raw, they thrust as many of their heads in as they could, and so continually

irritated and enlarged the orifice. What was a mere scratch became a sore under their incessant operations; and unless such sore was speedily defended by handkerchiefs or gloves, it would soon become a wound. Plaster was not enough, for they would suck and envenom the wound through it.

Insects are the pest of Australia. The gnats are terrible; then there are bull-dog ants, that fight for hours after they are out in half, and when they bite will not relax their hold though beheaded. Another persecutor is the fierce mosquito; and amongst Australian peculiarities of insect life are the centipede, the scorpion, and tarantula spider, the latter being called by the aborigines *triantawallagong*. The bite of either of these three last species of insect is extremely dangerous, often proving fatal unless promptly treated by cutting out the flesh around the bite and cauterizing the wound with fire.

After we had discussed our beef and damper, enjoyed a delicious drink from the creek, and had half an hour's draw at our pipes, we remounted and resumed our journey, making another twelve miles before sunset, when we encamped for the night, unsaddled our horses, hobbled them, lit the fire, boiled some tea in our billy, and sat down to enjoy our evening meal. Then we again had recourse to our pipes, and at length rolling ourselves in our blankets, and with the saddles for pillows, soon sunk into slumber both sound and deep.

The second day's journey was but a repetition of the first. There is great monotony in bush travelling. The heat, the thirst, the mosquitoes and other insects were the same; the only difference in the scenery was that every hour the towering mountain range we had to cross seemed looming larger and mightier before us; their summits, glittering in the sunlight three thousand feet and more above the level plains we were traversing, presented only a little deeper azure tint than did the cloudless firmament above. Well did they deserve their name of Blue Mountains.

On the afternoon of the second day after leaving Sydney we were at their base; and upon the earnest assurance of my mate that he had crossed them at this point before, and knew

every inch of the way, I consented to attempt the ascent at once, fully expecting, as it was only three o'clock and the evenings getting long, we should encamp by sunset on the western side.

We were soon riding along a steep, narrow gully, with almost precipitous sides, rising in lofty ridges that were covered with loose rocks and scraggy gum trees, charred and disfigured by frequent bush fires. It was a dreary scene, though here and there relieved by groups of pines and other eucalypti, with the jointed horsetail foliage of the shea oak, and the gaudy blossoms of the blue wattle, while the towering peaks of Mount Gwallior rose gloomy and cloud-wreathed above all.

"Are you sure you will find the pass, Rootes?" I asked; "because unless you are, it would be wiser to ride a matter of twenty miles round and follow the regular waggon track."

"Oh, I'm all right. I know it, never fear," retorted the young trooper, with a laugh; "why, 'tis not two years since I travelled it, man, and on my road to this very same Dune-watha too. It saves a round of very nearly nineteen miles by crossing the mountain here."

"And is it a pretty fair road for horses all the way?" I asked.

"Why, as to that, I shouldn't care to ride an unbroken colt or a broken-kneed old coach horse over some parts of the track, but with such nags as ours there is no hazard. In fact, there is only one dangerous place, and that does not continue for more than half a mile or so."

"And what is the nature of the danger, mate? I am unused to mountain scaling, and like to calculate my risks beforehand."

"The place is called 'The Devil's Ridge.' It is a passage along the side of one eminence which a cataract divides from another. It is seldom broad enough for two horses to pass each other, and often not room enough for one. It is bare of all rail or fence; in fact, it is impossible to fix any."

"And how deep is the precious precipice which this narrow pathway overlooks?" I asked, nervously.

"Deep? Oh, perhaps a thousand feet; but owing to the narrowness of the gorge, the bottom is invisible."

"And into this gulf the slightest trip of a horse would precipitate its rider—a worn shoe, a loose pebble, a nervous twitch of the rein, would be certain death?"

"Decidedly so; and I can tell you of a very curious adventure on this very same Devil's Ridge."

"The devil you can! Well, then, fire away, for you can scarcely make me more nervous than I feel already."

Rootes laughed. "It happened in this way," he said. "Two horsemen met in the narrow pass. Such a thing doubtless never occurred before, and perhaps never may again, the road is so rarely traversed; but this once it did so happen. Neither of the parties had space to back his steed, and so make room for the other to go by. They tossed up which should sacrifice his horse. It fell to the lot of the man ascending the ridge. He dismounted, pushed his horse over the precipice into the gulf below, and then, snake-like, crept between the legs of the descending horse and continued his journey on foot."

By the time my mate had concluded his story, which I have narrated in as few words as possible, we had ascended some three hundred feet of the mountain's height, and beheld a prospect of sea and land to the extent of a hundred and twenty miles. Almost beneath was a roaring cataract; to look down upon and listen to its hoarse brawl was enough to appal more daring natures than my own. Still up and up we went, the pathway having a zigzag tendency that made the ascent anything but laborious. As we attained a higher and yet a higher altitude, the change from heat to cold became very apparent, and by the time we had left the level plains some nine hundred feet below us, it was easy to imagine one's self transported from a tropical summer to a bracing northern winter.

Australian mountains differ very much in appearance from those of Europe, and this difference mainly consists in their being wooded to such an altitude. In the Northern Hemisphere it is rare to find a mountain bearing trees for more than a few hundred feet of its height, whereas the hardy and



sombre eucalypti of Australia and Tasmania frequently flourish to the very apex of mountains three thousand feet in altitude. This, in my opinion, although it *sometimes* gives a peculiar beauty of its own, in most cases detracts from the majesty and awe-inspiring grandeur that would otherwise distinguish the mountain ranges of Australia, while to the eye it decreases the effect of their height by at least one-third.

Rootes and I spoke little during the ascent; he looked meditative and I felt nervous, for an indescribable feeling had taken possession of me, to the effect that something terrible would happen to one or both of us before we descended to the level plain again. The very elements seemed impressed with my ill-omened forebodings, for the sky which had been so blue and sunny when we commenced the ascent, was now flecked with heavy reefy clouds that appeared to be hurrying to a common centre; great drops of rain began to fall, and presently the dull rumble of a distant thunder-peal fell upon our ears.

"I fear we are in for a ducking, mate," said Rootes, turning in his saddle; "the rain comes down here in buckets full when it once begins. Thank God our upward course is at an end, for we are at last opposite the pass. We now skirt the mountain, passing between it and its less lofty neighbour on our right. In five minutes we shall be descending the Devil's Ridge."

"And suppose our horses are startled at a thunder-clap, or shy at a lightning flash in such a spot?" I asked.

"Why, then 'twill be a long good night to Marmion," he answered, laughing; "but don't be afraid, friend, I think the storm will hold off for another half-hour, and if not, our horses are old stagers, and won't be frightened in a hurry."

As he spoke the sky momentarily brightened, and somewhat reassured, I replied, "Well, go ahead, old fellow. You appear to know the way, and where you lead you won't find me far behind."

We had now done with ascents, and had to round the mountain at about half the distance to its summit, in order to descend on the opposite side. Our peril was now about to

commence. Rootes was right, in five minutes we *were* on the Devil's Ridge, amidst all the horrors of perhaps the most dangerous and terrible mountain pass in the world.

We rode, of necessity, Indian file, Rootes at forty paces in advance. The pathway was a yard wide, certainly never more, and often somewhat less. On our left rose the precipitous mountain side, a sheer cliff, to a height of at least a thousand feet. On our right yawned a dire chasm, apparently bottomless, to a depth, as I afterwards learned, of nine hundred and fifty feet; while from the bottom arose the roar of water, as though seething and boiling from a subterranean Niagara. I do not hesitate to affirm that at any part of the pass, had I raised my arms in the shape of the letter T, the middle finger of my left hand would have touched the black oliff; and a pebble dropped perpendicularly from between the forefinger and thumb of my right, would have fallen into the whirling torrent below.

Luckily the path was good, being of rough rock, without a loose stone to be seen.

Terrible and dangerous as the pass was, it seemed to instil no alarm into the breast of my companion, who in the most narrow parts would turn in his saddle to see how I was getting on. His jet-black steed stepped out as gaily and as steadily as though on a broad coach road. Suddenly, however, just when he was traversing one of the narrowest ledges of the rock, a burst of thunder crashed through the narrow defile, and a flame of forked lightning shot and danced before his horse's eyes. The animal reared, beat the air for a moment with his fore-hoofs, and then plunged headlong into space, precipitating himself and rider into the abyss below.

In an instant—in the twinkling of an eye—horse and horseman had vanished for ever from my sight; and with my steed reined in until his haunches pressed the dark mountain side, whilst his fore-feet were planted in the rocky path within a couple of inches of the precipice, I gazed in agony at the fathomless grave that had so remorselessly swallowed up my unfortunate companion.

How can I describe my feelings when I beheld this awful spectacle, this hapless fate of one who, a moment before, in

all the pride and strength of manhood, was riding so gaily along only a few yards before me? The blood that, but a minute before, had been coursing healthfully through my veins, seemed to freeze and suspend its functions, while my brain appeared to reel about with lightness. It was a mercy that I did not lose my seat in the saddle and fall headlong after poor Jim Rootes. For at least an hour I must have remained stationary at this spot, gazing with horror-stricken yet almost imbecile stare down that dark abyss, until my heart and head seemed on fire, and I was almost a maniac; but, thank God, my reason at length returned, and I awoke to all the dangers of my own position.

I found the rain pouring down in torrents; the lightning was one continuous blaze of light; while the heavy thunder-peals, re-echoing again and again amid the mountain peaks and stormy ravines, sounded like the roar of heavy artillery. My horse was black with sweat and quivering with fear, as with dilated nostrils and glaring eyes he, too, gazed into the depths below him, as though terror was prompting him to essay the leap.

I saw that his fore-legs, from being kept so long in one position, were trembling, and the muscles strained. His sure-footedness was no longer to be depended upon, so, after a moment's consideration, I reined him round with his head down the pass, and freeing my feet from the stirrups, let the bridle fall loosely on his neck, and then slipped to the ground over his tail.

Even at this moment I tremble to think to what a terrible fate a kick or even the slightest movement on his part would have consigned me whilst I executed this manœuvre; as it happened, it was accomplished in safety, and I prepared to descend the ridge on foot, driving my charger before me. It was very slow progress. Sometimes the poor animal was so frightened that neither threats nor coaxings had any effect upon him, and he would stand trembling and whining most piteously for some minutes without moving a step. The rain, too, had made the rocky path slippery, and every dozen paces or so he would slip out and nearly topple over the precipice. Nevertheless, after another half-hour's torture,

such as I never experienced before, and trust I never shall again, I could see the end of the Devil's Ridge about a quarter of a mile before us, and the sloping mountain side beyond.

Hope now reanimated my bosom, and I do believe the poor horse felt it too, for he never loitered in his advance until we were within a few yards from the end of the Ridge. Then he stopped short, and no effort of mine would induce him to move forward. Not knowing the cause of this seeming obstinacy, I looked over his back at the road in front, and, to my horror and despair, perceived that a flash of lightning had cleft the solid rock, and caused some couple of yards in length of the pathway to slip into the gulf.

To scale the mountain side was next to impossible. My horse could not do it ; and to manage a clear six-foot leap without a run and in my present nervous state, was a matter of no great certainty. I must, however, do this, or retrace my way along the Devil's Ridge over the path already traversed. This I could by no means make up my mind to do. Anything seemed preferable to re-crossing that terrible pass. I made up my mind to sacrifice my horse, and then essay the *leap for life!*

I could scarcely summon the heart to consign my noble charger to so terrible a doom, but his death was a necessity, and I steeled my heart for the sacrifice. I pushed him over, and with one wild shriek (for horses can shriek when in extreme terror, and the sound, though indescribable, if once heard can never be forgotten) he disappeared from sight, though his heavy rebound from rock to rock in his descent, and ultimate dull splash into deep water at the bottom, rose plainly to my ear.

I now divested myself of my sword, belt, and coat, and threw them across the chasm ; then I braced myself for the leap, keeping my eye steadily fixed upon the firm ground on the other side, and refraining from glancing below, lest I should turn giddy. At length I sprang—gained the opposite bank, but my foot slipped—I lost my balance and fell backwards, luckily clutching the spreading branches of a shrub in my descent, and thus saving myself from instant death.

Was I saved? or was it a few minutes' respite only?

The shrub to which I clung grew from out a cleft in the rock. It was about a yard below the surface. Beneath me yawned the terrible chasm that divided the two mountains. Did the branch give way or my strength fail I knew that I should drop like a plummet into the torrent that roared beneath me. Then arose the thought, "Could I scale the cliff, and so reach the pathway above?" Alas! one glance at the dark slippery rock, without a single excrescence to aid foot or hand, forbade the thought. Death seemed inevitable.

Suddenly I perceived a shelving cliff upon which it might be possible to obtain a foothold. The question was, how to reach it; it was a desperate resource even for one so fearfully situated as myself. I glanced at the base of the shrub that bore me; it appeared to be firmly rooted, and not likely to give way. The branch which I grasped was long, sinewy, and tough. The idea struck me that I might, by swaying my body to and fro, give it and the branch the momentum of a pendulum, increasing it gradually so as at last to be able to swing myself on to the shelving cliff.

This notion had scarcely occurred to my mind when a new horror appalled me. Close to the roots of the shrub two small glittering eyes met mine, their metallic lustre seemed to fascinate me. Then I saw a forked tongue, and a flat, wedge-shaped head, which presently began to undulate from side to side as it approached me. The next instant I was aware of the dreadful fact that it was a diamond snake, one of the most venomous of its species; it had marked me as its victim.

My failing strength would not allow me to raise a hand to guard my face; the reptile was about to spring. At that moment a voice seemed to whisper in my ear, "The shelving rock—leap, and you are saved." As the voice prompted so I acted: by a vigorous jerk I gave the branch a sudden impetus; two swings, and I sprang boldly from it, alighting on the jutting crag in safety.

I now clambered up the rough side of the shelving rock, an angle of which presently hid the Devil's Ridge and its

dread ravine from view. Then my steps tottered, my eyes grew dim, myriads of fiery stars seemed to sparkle around me, and I fell to the ground in a swoon.

I must have lain thus for hours—yes, the whole night. When I recovered consciousness the sun was just rising over the mountain tops. It was a glorious morning. A thousand feet beneath spread a vast level country, with white stations dotted here and there, few and far between. I felt very weak, but was able to crawl down the mountain side, and about an hour later reached its base. Here, happily—for I was almost dying of thirst and hunger—I came across a shepherd's hut. I stayed there the day and night. The next morning at dawn I set out for Dunewatha, and reached the out-station of mounted police, to which I was bound, about an hour before sundown.

## THE LUBRA'S REVENGE; OR, THE FIRE AT GARRYONG.

ONE day during the five weary months that I was quartered at Dunewatha, as I was sitting upon a rude bench in front of our wooden station, having a draw at my pipe while surveying discontentedly the dust-dimmed, sun-scorched landscape around, and feeling disgusted with myself, the service, and everything else sublunary, my attention was attracted by the sudden appearance of a little black boy, half naked, riding a great brown stock horse at full gallop towards the station. In a few minutes more he was alongside of me, and with no little difficulty induced his animal to stop.

"Hallo, Snowball! what do you want?" I said.

I can't very well imitate the broken English of the Australian natives, much as I have been amongst them, so I won't attempt it here. Suffice it to say, that with many interjections and gesticulations he informed me that Mrs. Captain Leslie, of the Garryong Station, had told him to ride as hard as he could to our outpost, and bring back with him a trooper or constable as quickly as possible. More than this he did not know, so the nature of the service required could not even be guessed at.

The proverb says that "where ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be wise," so consoling myself that it might be so in the present instance, I told one or two of my mates where I was going, and then saddling my bay charger and furbishing myself up to the nines, on account of there being a lady in the case, I informed the black imp on the stock horse that I was

at his service, and away we trotted on our twenty-five miles' ride through the bush.

Arrived at our destination, I was at once ushered into the presence of the lady of the house, whom I found to be a buxom, good-looking woman, of about forty years of age, wearing a stout cotton gown, and with her sleeves tucked up to her elbows, and her white fat arms dusted with flour, whilst strips of dough adhered to her fingers. This deshabelle was accounted for by a half-manufactured pumpkin pie which stood on the deal table.

"I believe I address Mrs. Leslie?" I said, with a bow, on entering the room.

"Yes, I am Mrs. Leslie; sit down, sir," she rejoined, pointing to a seat.

I then asked her the nature of the service required of me, and she told me the following tale:—

"For the past three months the station had been much frequented with the blacks. At first only one or two had made their appearance, but the regularity with which damper and scraps of meat had been given to them had no doubt caused others to repair to so desirable a locality. The first recipients of Mrs. Leslie's bounty had been a tall lanky aboriginal and his lubra (wife), with a couple of piccaninnies; but by and by, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, fathers, mothers, cousins, and still more remote relatives, had swelled the list of recipients to such an extent, that often ten or twelve men, women, and children would at the same time be clamouring at the doors and windows of the home station for damper, mutton, baccy, and rum. This, of course, became an intolerable nuisance, and at length supplies were stopped altogether; and day after day the mortified blacks had to go away empty-handed. Seeing that no one helped them, these rascals thought that they would help themselves. Sheep and lambs began to be missed pretty frequently, one or two dogs were speared; everything left out of doors at night was sure to be stolen before morning, and, in short, Mrs. Leslie's sable friends soon became terrible bores. At length matters reached a crisis. A new overseer had been appointed on the station, a man not over-scrupulous as to trifles. He had come from the



Southern States of America, and had there learnt to regard a black man in the light of a chattel. One day he had hung some shirts outside his hut to dry, and, as at nightfall they were still damp, he did not take them in, thinking, that as his dog was loose, the blacks would be afraid to come near. He was mistaken. An aboriginal *did* come, speared his dog, and stole his shirts. The dying howl of the dog awoke its master, who sprang to the window and saw the thief making off with his shirts. He seized his revolver, rushed after him, and shot him dead, leaving him to lie where he fell. The next day his body was discovered by his countrymen, whose worst passions were now aroused. To them stealing was no crime; perhaps, in their uncivilized code of morals, a positive virtue. The widow of the unfortunate black fellow went to the home station, and poured her complaints into the ear of Mrs. Leslie, whose husband was at the time in Sydney on business connected with the wool sales, and not expected home for three or four days. She asked for justice; for the *death* of the overseer. Mrs. Leslie's promise that he should be discharged and sent away did not satisfy her; it was his blood, his life, that she required. This she begged and entreated, but of course Mrs. Leslie would not grant her request. Then the lubra, seeing that she had only a nervous woman to deal with, began to threaten. She knew that Mr. Leslie would not return for some days, that there were only three or four men around the station, so she swore that Captain Leslie should never set eyes on his home more, that he should be waylaid and murdered on his return from Sydney; that Garryong should be burnt to the ground; and lastly, what was a more terrible threat than all to the fond mother, that her only child, a sweet little girl of about five years of age, should be stolen from her and brought up as a savage. Mrs. Leslie was too much alarmed by these threats to take any steps to prevent the woman's leaving the house, but an hour after her departure had despatched a messenger to the police out-station, the result of which, as the reader is aware, was my present visit.

At the conclusion of her narrative Mrs. Leslie asked my opinion on the matter.

I confess I was rather puzzled to answer her; I was not

much acquainted with the characteristics and habits of the aboriginal population, though I knew them to be cruel and revengeful, but at the same time rank cowards. I therefore advised Mrs. Leslie to keep the child as much as possible in the house for the next few days; and recommended that to guard against any act of incendiarism on the part of the blacks, two of the station hands should be on the alert all night, and keep walking around the homestead. I promised to use every endeavour to capture the lubra, and get her punished for her threats. All the consolation, however, that I could offer did not seem to pacify Mrs. Leslie; she was in a terribly nervous state, and begged me to stay at the station for a day or two as a guard. At last I promised to do so, and writing a letter to my mates at the outpost, stating the reason of my non-return, and desiring them to look out for the black woman, and if they could find her to lose no time in locking her up, I prepared to make myself at home amid the comforts that now surrounded me.

That night the mother and her little girl slept in a room next the one allotted to me. Both rooms were on the ground-floor; the station being, like most of its class, only one story high. The windows, which were French ones, were nearly level with the ground outside, and overlooked the large, smoothly mown lawn, which sloped down to a small creek whose waters sparkled at its base. Mrs. Leslie, according to my advice, carefully bolted her windows on the inside, while I left mine wide open, and went to sleep with my loaded revolver under my pillow.

We must both have slept very soundly, for it was broad daylight on the following morning when I was awoke by a wild cry of despair from the adjoining room. I immediately sprang out of bed, dressed, and then knocked at Mrs. Leslie's door. She opened it at once. I noticed that she was clad in a richly embroidered silk dressing-gown. Her face was pale as death.

"Mr. Brooke, my little girl is gone!" she exclaimed, and then fainted.

I summoned her maid, and then examined the fastenings of the window. I saw that the thief had entered the apart-

ment by skilfully taking out two panes of glass, one at the top, the other at the bottom of the window, and then inserting a hand through the aperture and withdrawing the bolts. On the lawn and on the paths I noticed the impress of a foot, which from its smallness I knew to be a woman's. Thus I became aware that the lubra had fulfilled one of her three threats.

I did not allow myself any time to partake of breakfast that morning. I hastily swallowed a cup of coffee and then mounted my horse. The lubra's footprints led down to the creek. Here of course the trail failed; and upon crossing over, I could not recover it on the opposite bank. I scoured the country all day, but not a black was to be seen anywhere, and at nightfall, with a lame horse and a sorrowful heart, I returned to Garryong, where I found Mrs. Leslie in a wild delirium, occasioned by the loss of her child and her increasing fears for her husband's safety.

Painful incidents were not, however, to come singly. While I was sitting down to a beefsteak and a cup of tea, a servant rushed in with the intelligence that the bush was on fire, and that a stiff breeze from the west was blowing the conflagration towards the home station.

I at once rushed out into the verandah, and there a grand spectacle met my gaze.

It was night. About a mile from the station rose a hill called Cat's Back, doubtless because its shape was like that of a cat's back when erected in a passion. This hill was some hundred and fifty feet in height, and covered with trees. It now presented an imposing sight. An Australian Vesuvius or Etna it fairly seemed, rising with fiery grandeur amid the darkness of the surrounding forest, which looked more sombre than usual on account of the ruddy blaze that enveloped tree and shrub from near the base to the very summit of the mount. The fire spread with such rapidity as soon to cover the whole face of the hill as seen from the station with one sheet of flame, so that it looked like a vast orb of solid fire, rising over a world of darkness.

Presently the scene changed: the scattering flames of fire, swept by the wind away into the thick undergrowth, served

to kindle new mischief, and to enlarge the scope of devastation. The sight now was one of the grandest description. I could hear the roar of the flames as they careened through the compact wood, and every now and then the ear was stunned by the falling of burning timber in every direction. Occasionally, as one of the old giants of the forest succumbed to the fury of the fire and fell crashing amongst the crackling underwood, the flames would leap up a hundred feet into the air, and throw up a myriad fiery stars to twice that altitude.

The fire moved on at the rate of at least a mile and a half an hour towards the devoted station, which was now in terrible danger, as the long yellow grass, dry as tinder, grew up to the very out-buildings, which, with the roof of the homestead itself, were of wood.

Had there been no wind, or had it blown in any other direction than towards the station, danger might have been averted by ourselves setting fire to the grass for a radius of a quarter of a mile around, thus preventing the onward rush of the bush fire by depriving it of further material on which to feed. As matters stood, however, this ruse could be of no service, and so, as a last resource, the station hands began to pack waggons with the furniture and other valuables preparatory to retreating before the destroyer.

The fire had now spread into a vast conflagration, occupying at least two miles in breadth, and exhibiting a moving mass of flame surmounted by dense clouds of smoke, awful in grandeur and extent. Already sparks began to fall around us; the air was so hot that it blistered our hands and faces, while we were half suffocated with the smoke which curled over our heads in sulphureous wreaths.

The horses were at last in the waggons, having been blindfolded before being brought out of their stalls, so that the unnatural light should not frighten them; for the lurid flames had dispelled the darkness so effectually that the smallest print would have been readable.

Mrs. Leslie was now led out by her maid. Her delirium had passed away, but she was very pale. As she was about to mount one of the waggons she recognised me, and said

sadly, "The second threat of the black woman is accomplished; perhaps by this time the third also, for I had a letter from my husband this morning saying that he might be home to-night."

By this time the roar of the flames behind the station was like the sound of a cataract. The swift-winged beetle and flocks of wild birds flew over our heads; fleet, bounding kangaroos and long-legged emus passed by on the other side of the cockatoo fence that encircled the home paddock, frightened by the flames in their rear; then, with discordant howls, a pack of dingoes, or native dogs, swept by at full speed. The fire was now within a quarter of a mile from the house, and the waggons began to move away.

I had mounted my charger, having first blindfolded him, but drew rein for a moment to take a last glance at the scene. It was an awful sight; a sea of fire, roaring in its fury, with its heaving, leaping waves, and unearthly hisses, approaching each moment nearer and nearer. I turned my back on the destroyer, and was about to ride after the waggons, when, to my intense surprise, I was greeted by a strong gust of wind directly in my face—a spiteful, uncertain blast, blowing crabwise, but yet for a minute it caused me a greater, a more exquisite pleasure than the softest, balmiest English summer breeze could have done. Another steady blow from the same direction completed my satisfaction, for I knew that the wind had suddenly changed, veered, in fact, directly around, and was now blowing half a gale from the east.

What a refreshing change this cool, invigorating wind was from the hot dry furnace blast that had surrounded me a moment before! but it was not this that overjoyed me. It was the fact that the station might yet be saved, for if the breeze kept up from its present direction the fire could advance no further.

A lusty cheer from the distance at this moment told me that Mrs. Leslie and the station hands had made a similar discovery. I rode into the paddock, and saw the waggons returning to the station. Presently the blue sky was visible

overhead, the stars sparkled out—the whole voice of nature seemed to echo, “Thus far shalt thou come and no further.”

When Mrs. Leslie descended from the waggon, the expression of her countenance was far more hopeful than when she had entered it. Perhaps she thought, that as an Almighty power had interposed and saved her property, so it would interpose also to save her child. I own that I had such a presentiment when, dismounting by her side, I said respectfully, “If you can let me have a fresh horse from your stables, I will again set out and seek your little girl.”

She turned towards me and said, with a faint smile, “I fear I am taxing your kindness greatly. You have undergone much fatigue since the morning, and must require rest.”

“Pardon me, madam, I will rest when my work is accomplished. I am quite up to another bush ride, and, in short, I have my reasons for setting out at once.”

“Indeed! have you any hopes, then?” eagerly inquired the mother.

“I have, Mrs. Leslie, but I would rather not explain them now,” I answered, and to avoid further questioning, I bowed and moved off towards the stables.

Five minutes later, mounted on a strong stock horse, I was riding at full speed from the station.

Now the idea that had occurred to me was this. The lubra, either alone or with other blacks, had no doubt set fire to the bush just on the ridge of Cat's Back Hill, trusting that the strong wind would speedily urge the flames forward until they destroyed the station. Most probably, then, the incendiary or incendiaries would remain in concealment somewhere behind this hill until they either discovered that their plan had been successful, or until the change of wind blew the fire back in their faces and caused them to retreat before it. My plan was therefore to round the conflagration and get in its rear, where very likely I might find the lubra and the stolen child. One thing I felt sure of, which was, that if I did not make the capture now, the probability was that I might never be able to do so, as doubtless, after so flagrant an act of hostility the blacks would make themselves scarce,

and, with the little girl, proceed perhaps some hundreds of miles into the far interior, whither it would be folly and madness to pursue them.

I pushed my horse on as speedily as possible, riding along the whole front of the conflagration, and as near to it as the heat would allow.

It was now three o'clock in the morning; the fire had already raged for eight hours, and I found the front to be about six miles long. At last, however, I succeeded in rounding it, and half an hour later I gained its rear, or rather what had been its rear; for it was now, as a matter of course, its front, the wind having changed completely round. Cat's Back Hill now seemed in about the centre of the conflagration, and I had to make a wide detour to steer clear of the advancing flames.

I had ridden in this manner about a couple of miles further, and had given up almost all hopes of coming across the lubra, when I noticed a movement amid the scrub on my left. At first I fancied it might be caused by a snake or some wild animal, but when I looked again I perceived the face of a black fellow peer for a moment above the bushes and then duck under cover. The next moment a spear glanced by me, so close that it grazed my shoulder.

"Hang it!" thought I, "these rascals are in ambush, and I shall never attain my object unless I hit upon some clever scheme to outwit them." While these thoughts occupied my attention a waddy whizzed through the air and came crack right against my stout leather shako with such a hearty good will that it made my head ring again. Thank Heaven, however, it did not stagger me or confuse my senses for an instant. On the contrary, it enabled me to put the plot I had been hatching in my brain into execution. The very moment the waddy hit me, therefore, I fell from my horse, and lay as if dead. I knew that the stock horse was too old a hand to leave the spot, and as for the savages, as long as he stood by me and my revolver held a single charge, I did not care a pin for them.

My reason for this ruse I will explain. I was sufficiently acquainted with the habits of the blacks to know, that directly

they saw me fall from my horse and lie still, they would all rush out of ambush and surround me, thinking I was dead. If the revengeful lubra was amongst the party, the child would doubtless be in her arms or by her side, so that by springing suddenly up I might be able to wrest it from her, and then make the whole party scamper away by showing them my firearms ; for a white man with a six-chambered Colt or Adams, may, in open ground, drive a score or so of these black fellows before him like a flock of sheep,—the aborigines of Australia, or at least those *south* of Queensland, being about the rankest cowards on the face of the globe.

I had hardly been on the ground a minute when I saw a dusky form creep out of the scrub, then came another, and another, until I counted a dozen. I was sadly afraid I had taken all my trouble for nothing, when, to my joy, a thirteenth form sprang from out the cover, and my heart beat quickly, for I saw that it was a woman, and that a white child was clutched in her arms.

I now held my breath, and half closed my eyes.

Cautiously they came nearer, and at last surrounded me, dancing, screaming, and indulging in such an exuberant "yabber ! yabber !" that it nearly deafened me. The woman at first held aloof, but presently she came right up to me, and endeavoured to tear a button from my coat ; doubtless the glittering silver had attracted her.

Here was the very opportunity I had longed for ; with one bound I sprang to my feet, I dragged the child out of her arms, and, drawing my revolver, cried, "Away, you rascals, or I'll shoot every mother's son of you !"

By Jove ! there was not a single one of them man enough to hurl a spear or throw a boomerang or waddy. They turned tail and ran for the scrub, and with equal speed I sprang into the saddle, placed the child before me, and set spurs to my horse. The savages, brave enough now that they were hid behind the scrub again, hurled a shower of missiles at me. One spear tore up the sleeve of my coat, another grazed my ear, while a waddy hit the horse on the flank. In another minute, however, we were clear of danger, and an



hour later I reached Garryong station, and restored the little girl to her mother.

A happier meeting than that it has never been my lot to witness ; and as if to complete Mrs. Leslie's joy, just as she had kissed her rescued darling for about the hundredth time, the sound of a horse's hoofs were audible without, followed by heavy footsteps in the passage, and the next moment the dining-room door was thrown open, and a rough, manly voice exclaimed, " Why, what the deuce brings you all up at this hour in the morning ? " The owner of the voice, ere the sentence was concluded, entered the apartment. He was a fine, burly, red-headed country gentleman, and with a cry of joy Mrs. Leslie placed the child on the sofa, and threw herself into his arms. -

It was Mr. Leslie, returned safe from Sydney, and thus neither of the lubra's three threats were accomplished successfully. As for the woman herself, I never saw or heard of her more, for in spite of all our efforts to catch her, lest she might plan and execute further mischief, she eluded us, and with her party fled, without doubt, into the interior, to escape a dreaded retribution.

After a hearty breakfast, and a very handsome present received from Mr. Leslie, I quitted Garryong, on my return to our out-station. By this time the fire had somewhat abated, but though in one or two places it seemed to be quite extinguished, a fallen tree would occasionally light up the charred, blackened scrub again, and send a thousand sparkling stars of fire towards the now sunlit sky. All danger from the conflagration, however, was past, though it continued to smoulder for another couple of days, when a summer thunder-shower extinguished it altogether.

## THE ACE OF SPADES.

A SCENE IN A SYDNEY GAMBLING SALOON IN 1855.

WHEN I was quartered in Sydney in the year 1855, that city did not wear the quiet, dull, English market-town appearance that it does at present. The gold fever was not yet decidedly on the wane, and bright-shirted diggers from Ophir, Bathurst, and other inland gold fields were still the lions of George and Pitt Streets, and the principal personages which the caterers of public amusement sought to please.

They were rough fellows most of them, but the majority were honest, while not a few possessed gentle blood and a university education. There were, however, as a matter of course, many roughs amongst so large a number, and some villains of the deepest dye. Fellows of this latter class were always to be met with amid the purlieus of Sussex or Cumberland Streets, or at night in the many low play-houses and gambling-saloons that were so prevalent in the neighbourhood of York Street or Brickfield Hill.

I had often listened to descriptions of the interior of one or other of these temples devoted to the deity—cards; and one night, being off duty, I determined to set out in search of adventures, and penetrate the mysteries of one or two of the most notorious of these places ere my return.

After attending the Victoria Theatre, therefore, where I witnessed a very lengthy melodrama of the "Jonathan Wilde" and "Newgate Calendar" stamp, I discussed some

prime oysters (for Sydney rock oysters are equal in flavour to London natives), together with a pint of stout, and it being by this time about eleven o'clock, I marched off to a gaming-house which I knew to be situated on the Brickfield Hill side of Pitt Street.

When I entered the room the clouds of tobacco smoke were so dense, that for a few minutes I could not perceive anything clearly, but in a little while I became used to it, and then a strange scene presented itself.

It was a very large room, but low, and, to my idea, excessively dirty. At one end was a bar, with its usual background of bottle-laden shelves. A very stout, brown-wigged, red-nosed woman, of dubious age, was presiding over this department; and, to judge from her vacant smiles, and the frequent mistakes she made in drawing the wrong liquors, she must have been already considerably more than fuddled.

Scattered throughout the rest of the room were deal tables of every size and form, around which sat as motley groups as it is possible to conceive—swell diggers, distinguished by their loud-patterned shirts and Chinese silk scarfs, mingled with stockdrivers, navvies, sailors, loafers, and every other variety of the genus “scamp.”

All kinds of games were in progress, but cards seemed to be the favourite pastime; and I had hardly been in the room ten minutes when I became absorbed in a game of whist waged fiercely between a couple of diggers on the one side and a brace of—as I had no doubt—out-and-out sharpers on the other.

They were “game and game” when I first approached their table, and in the third one of the rub the diggers had crept up a single point at a deal to “three by cards,” when, in the fifth deal, their opponents marked “four by honours,” but purposely lost the trick, thus making the game “four all.” I could see that the honours were obtained by trickery, and that the single point by cards which would have secured them the rubber was lost intentionally, for the reason, I had no doubt, of encouraging betting. Anyhow it had that effect, for the diggers were half-screwed, and were willing to give and take any odds that the rub was theirs. The result

was, that although they were playing at a guinea a point, in addition to ten guineas on the rubber, they were let into some twenty-five pounds each in beta.

It went against my grain to stand by and see the poor fellows so chiselled, and I whispered a warning to the elder and more sober of the two, but the reply I got was a leer of drunken cunning, and a threatening scowl from one of the sharpers who overheard me. In spite of this, I determined to foil the rogues if possible. It was now the turn 'of the younger of the gamesters to deal, and as he took up the cards for that purpose, I saw the deuce of clubs at the bottom of the pack, but in the middle of the deal, with a quick movement of the hand, he slipped this bottom instead of the top card to the player on his left, and when the trump came to be turned up it proved to be the ace of spades.

I looked over his partner's shoulder as he sorted his cards, and saw that he held the king, knave, and five small trumps, and at the same moment a tall, gaunt fellow, who throughout the rubber had been overlooking the two diggers' cards, knocked the ash from his cigar with two applications of his little finger, spitting at the same time on the floor *to his left*. I knew that the expectoration in this direction meant spades, and that the number of times he touched his cigar signified the number of trumps in the hand of the digger, while the peculiar flourish of his little finger at the close intimated that one of them was an honour.

The game was of course played out; the rogues, as a necessary consequence, won; and the diggers, half-sobered by their losses, were about to hand over the stakes.

"Stop, mates," I said. "You have been cheated. Instead of parting with your gold, just help me to give these fellows into custody."

"Liar!" screamed one of the blacklegs. "Prove your words, or by G— I'll knife you."

"I can easily do that," I replied. "Hand over your pack, and I will prove that you have been playing with *brief*\*

\* *Brief* packs have the court cards a trifle longer, the minor cards a trifle broader than the others. In cutting them the sharper can always secure a court card in trumps, and *vice versa*.

cards ; and as for your tall friend, he has been performing the old *pipin*\* trick, and revealing the cards held by your dupes throughout the rubber. Give me the ace of spades, the last trump turned up, and I will show you the *corner bend*† on it."

The uproar that arose when I made this disclosure defies description. I had thought that there were as many honest men in the room as blackguards, but I was mistaken. The few who were there slipped away, and in a minute or two the two diggers, who had succeeded in pocketing their stakes, and myself, were fighting for our very lives to escape from the house into the street.

"The ace of spades is it that ye want, ye 'tarnal skunk?" growled one of the sharpers, a gigantic fellow with the strength of an ox ; and as he spoke, he pressed the card against my chest with his left hand, while with his right he drove a long-bladed knife into my body, right through the card, thus nailing it to me.

The whole thing was done so suddenly that I had no time to avoid the stroke, but after I received it, I sprang at my assassin, and floored him with one blow, falling over him insensible the moment I had done so.

When consciousness returned I found myself in the hospital ; my wound was being dressed. The ace of spades, still transfixed by the knife, lay on the floor close by. Two inches or so of its blade was stained with blood.

My wound proved very troublesome. I was in the hospital six weeks, and it was a much longer time before I was quite restored to health.

With regard to the other actors in the scene at the gaming house, the two diggers escaped with a few bruises, and, what is more, succeeded in carrying away their cash with them. Before I left Sydney they presented me with a handsome watch as a *souvenir* of their gratitude for the pecuniary losses from which I had saved them. Two of the

\* So called because a pipe is generally used, and the disposing of the fingers on the pipe whilst smoking discovers the principal cards in the hand of the person he overlooks.

† Four cards turned down finely at one corner,—a signal to cut by.

rascally cardsharppers escaped, but the tall fellow who had stabbed me was arrested three days later, and in return for his bit of knife work got three years' penal servitude. Since the expiration of that sentence he has turned bushranger, been captured, and is now a convict for life.

## THREE GOLDEN HAIRS.

It was towards the close of 1855 that I joined the detective force of Adelaide, South Australia. One bright November morning I stepped on board the steamer *Wollongong* at Sandridge, and after a rapid passage reached the third rising city of "the Empire of the Southern Seas."

I confess that I was at first delighted with Adelaide, for I found it a town, or rather city, presenting a contrast—and a very marked one—to both Melbourne and Sydney. The streets were bordered with Norfolk pines, giving it an American air, while the remarkably clean-looking houses with their verandahs, gardens, and bright green jalousies, and the attractive outward appearance presented by the shops, many of which displayed as choice an assortment of wares as Regent or New Bond Street establishments could do, rendered it almost possible to imagine oneself transplanted to an European city, the more so as Adelaide was the chief German resort in Australia, and the language of the "fatherland" was as frequently heard in its streets as the dialect of the Celt or Saxon.

Adelaide presents many features worthy of remark. It is divided into two distinct portions, north and south, the former comprising an area of 300 acres, the latter 700. The streets are systematically laid out, being twenty-two in number, and intersecting each other at right angles. They are from 60 to 130 feet wide. Squares, a rare thing in Australian towns, are met with here and there, and a large area of park land that environs the city is reserved for a boulevard for the recreation of the inhabitants.

The population of Adelaide when I first arrived there

was about 20,000 ; it has since then much increased. An assessment of one shilling per pound on the rental amounted, I recollect, to £5,500, which will afford some idea of the value of house property at that time. South Adelaide, the commercial quarter, bore a thriving aspect, its business being chiefly concentrated about Rundle, Hindley, and King William Streets, though many others almost equalled them in bustle. These streets resemble those of an English country town. Drapers, grocers, and others, revelled in spacious well-stocked premises. Members of the Jewish persuasion ruled over cheap clothing depôts on a very extensive scale ; and some very imposing stone edifices, yclept "stores," especially attracted my attention. These latter belonged to merchants, and were used for the reception of English goods, which were thence sold wholesale to retail dealers, squatters, and country residents.

Most shopkeepers I found dealt in the general way, supplying that multifarious description of articles which, under the comprehensive term of "notions," are to be had at Yankee stores ; but these things are altered now in America, I hear. Adelaide tradesmen, I found, fully appreciated the advantage of puffing, for I discovered that pretended failures and *sellings off* were common *ruses* to draw attraction, whilst tempting announcements through the medium of tickets, informing the public of the sacrifices they were prepared to make, met your eye in every street.

Amusements, too, were numerous,—a capital theatre, two or three public rooms, concert halls, dancing saloons, &c., being sprinkled here and there. In fact, the city of Adelaide affords a striking proof of the notable saying that "the Anglo-Saxon reproduces his country wherever he plants his country's flag," for although South Australia had been then colonized only about twenty years, the traveller who visited this capital in 1855 might, in perambulating its business streets, imagine himself in Exeter, Gloucester, or Worcester, whilst its more retired quarters would, to a German, seem as if a lump of his "fatherland" had suddenly dropped before him from the moon.

But I must cease description, and at once commence the



narration of a most remarkable case in which I was destined to form one of the chief actors shortly after my arrival in Adelaide.

Early one morning, as I was sitting in my office reading the Melbourne papers, a young man, with tears in his eyes, came to give information that a girl, named Lucy Floyd, residing at No. 36, Brownlow Street, and by profession a circus rider, had been discovered lying dead in her bedroom on the second floor, and that there was a suspicion of foul play in the matter. I at once intimated to my informant that I would accompany him to Brownlow Street and personally investigate the matter, and a quarter of an hour later we stood in the room where the dead girl still lay in her long, last sleep.

She was lying on her back ; her head was on the hearth-rug ; her feet nearly touched the foot of the bedstead. The only article of clothing she had on was her nightdress. Her face was pale, but from its expression I could tell that her last moments had been free from pain.

Upon examination of the body, I could not discover any clue as to how she had come by her death. There was no wound, no blood, no marks of violence, with the exception of a trifling swelling on the left temple. It also seemed to me as if some hairs had been lost from the left eyebrow. As for the swelling, it was of so trivial a nature that I never for a moment imagined it sufficient to cause death, and I continued my investigations,—smelling her nostrils and half parted lips to see whether I could detect the fumes of ether or chloroform, examining the muscles of the throat and the eyes for any significations of suffocation, and the colour of the tongue and rigidity of the fingers for symptoms of a death by poison. I could make nothing of it, and felt satisfied that the discovery of the cause of death rested with the medical profession at the inquest. I was convinced, however, that the poor girl was murdered, but more, I own, from a kind of mysterious impression to that effect than from any definite course of reasoning.

A glance around the room assured me that the murder, if murder it was, could not have been committed for the sake

of plunder, as a valuable gold watch, a purse containing money, and some rings, lay on the toilet-table.

I now carefully searched the apartment for any traces left by an intruder, but could find none, with the exception of a small piece of plaster, which lay on the floor just under the window. The room being papered this could not have come from the walls, nor could it have fallen from the ceiling, for that was painted pink, whereas the plaster was whitewashed. I consequently concluded that it came from the outside wall, and opened the window to make further investigations.

Further and more important clues now presented themselves. Fortunately the window-frame on the outside had been newly painted, and on the ledge was the impress of a thumb and three fingers. From their position I could tell that they had been so placed for the purpose of lifting the sash. I discovered also that a minute portion of the stone window sill was chipped off, as though by an iron-rimmed boot heel; and what was still more important, about a yard or so below this window sill a fragment of plaster had been knocked from the whitewashed wall, which from its shape could have been none other than the piece that I had picked up in the bedroom. How the assassin had mounted to the window was also apparent, for a leaden spout ran from the garden below up to the roof, passing the window at a distance of about a couple of feet, and this spout also bore scratches from nail-shod boots. Upon descending the stairs, and going out into the garden, I found that there were footmarks leading from its western corner, outside which ran a narrow right-of-way called "A'Beckett Lane," right up to the base of the spout before-mentioned and back again. These footprints were very large, and the boots that made them would seem to have belonged to a hard-working countryman or navvy, from the clinker-shod sides and the number of great hob-nails in the soles of them. I say *would seem to have belonged*, because I did not for a moment believe that they did belong to either a countryman or navvy; and the fact that these footprints were impressed deeply into the ground, and that their wearer had crossed flower beds, and such places as were most likely to retain their impression, convinced me that the murderer

had cunningly worn these large boots for the purpose of throwing the authorities off the scent in any investigations they might make.

Having concluded my search, I placed a constable in charge of the room where the dead girl lay, with orders that no one should be allowed to enter until the arrival of the coroner, whom I sent for at once; and then adjourning to the sitting-room down stairs, I begged the young man who had first brought me the intelligence of the murder, and who was the only son of the lodging-house keeper, to tell me as much as he could of the antecedents of the deceased.

From him I learned that the circus in which Lucy Floyd (or to quote the play-bills "Madlle. Duroc") performed had been in Adelaide about a month, and during the whole of that time she had lodged at his mother's house, occupying the same bedroom on the second floor, and taking her meals with the family. She was a very quiet, well-behaved girl, regular in her habits, and always at home a few minutes after the performance was over of an evening. The young man then told me that he had been engaged to her about a week, and that preparations had already been made for their approaching marriage.

"Was your engagement to her generally known?" I asked.

"Only to one or two individuals," was the reply.

"Had you any rival in the young lady's affections?" I next inquired.

"Yes, one; Mr. McDonald the clown had been very attentive to her, and asked her to marry him the very day after she had accepted me. Lucy told me that he was sadly put out about it, and had said that 'she should not marry me at all.'"

"And did this Mr. McDonald know the position of her bedroom?"

"He did."

"Then I must have an interview with him," I remarked, and quitted the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

The inquest was held on the following morning; the medical evidence went to prove that deceased had met her

death "from concussion of the brain, caused by a blow on the left temple with a blunt instrument," and after half an hour's consideration the jury returned a verdict as follows:—

"We, the jury, find that Lucy Floyd, *alias* Louise Duroc, died at South Adelaide, on Thursday the 15th December, 1855, of concussion of the brain—the said concussion having been caused from a blow from a blunt instrument, in an attempt to commit grievous bodily harm; and we further find a verdict of wilful murder against some person or persons unknown."

Directly I learned the finding of the jury, accompanied by two constables, I proceeded to the lodgings of McDonald the clown, which I had had watched closely for the preceding twenty-four hours, and a few minutes later I stood in his presence.

McDonald had just finished breakfast, and was now leaning back in an arm chair by the open window, reading the *Advertiser*. He dropped the paper on the floor as we entered the room, and regarded us nervously.

Without saying a word, I walked to the window, closed the sash and drew down the blind; then turning to him abruptly, I demanded, "What is your name?"

"Joseph McDonald," he answered.

"Otherwise 'the great little Borello,' clown in the Cirque de l'Empetrice?"

"The same."

"Then I arrest you for the murder of Lucy Floyd, *alias* Louise Duroc," I said, sternly.

The most close observer would not have noticed the slightest alteration in his countenance as I made the charge, for he had only taken a minute or so to recover his self-possession. He was about to reply, when I cautioned him that "what he was going to say might possibly criminate him, and that, in that case, such statements would be used against him," whereupon he merely remarked, "that we must be precious fools to take him for a murderer," and relapsed into dignified silence.

I had him searched, but nothing suspicious was found on his person. I then clapped the irons on him, and we began to thoroughly overhaul the apartments.

After an hour's search, during which time we turned everything topsy-turvy, and effectually ransacked the most remote corners, we gave up the investigation, rather chagrined, with the exception of a heavy, old, flint-locked pistol, we found nothing calculated to strengthen the suspicion against our prisoner.

The pistol in question had evidently not been loaded for a long while; but its brass inlaid stock was well adapted to give a heavy and fatal blow, even if wielded by a weak arm, and for that reason I put it into my pocket.

We were now about to leave the house with our prisoner, when the idea struck me that I would rake out the embers of the fire, and search amongst the ashes. I proceeded to do so, and was rewarded by finding several scraps of half-consumed leather, and more than eight dozen nearly red-hot nails, such as are used in the manufacture of rough country-men's blucher boots.

I carefully collected these fragments of leather and the nails, cooled the latter by pouring cold water over them, screwed them up in a piece of paper, and then instructing one of the constables to call a cab, we bundled McDonald into it, and drove him to the police-station.

During the drive, and whilst we were putting him into his cell, he did not utter a word. His bearing was firm and composed, and he certainly wore the air of an injured man; yet I felt certain that he was the criminal.

The next day he was brought before the magistrates, but the testimony against him was so slight that he was discharged, and the justices would not even grant a remand that I might have time to strengthen the chain of evidence. They, in fact, paid McDonald the compliment of telling him that "he would leave the court without a shadow of suspicion upon his name."

"Mr. Brooke, I wish you good morning," he said, turning towards me with a sarcastic smile, as he quitted the court.

"Good morning, Mr. McDonald; we shall meet again before long," I said, spitefully, in reply. The next moment he was gone.

That night I visited the circus. McDonald was there in

his clown's dress as "the great little Borello," and received a perfect ovation from the audience, not a soul of whom thought him guilty of the murder. Had I been recognised, no doubt I should have come in for a due share of hisses, but being in disguise I escaped notice. The circus was crowded, and during the performance the proprietor announced that on the following evening "great little Borello" would take his benefit, whereupon the thunders of applause were renewed, and McDonald had thrice to appear from behind the scenes and bow his acknowledgments.

Well, the next day came; and in spite of the discharge, ovation, and benefit, the clown had disappeared, leaving his stage wardrobe, personal baggage, and a month's arrears of salary behind him. He had left secretly, and without informing a soul of the object of his journey, or whither he was going. The proprietor of the circus was in consternation, and everybody seemed to think that he had either been murdered or had committed suicide.

I alone dissented from these views, for I jumped to the conclusion that, stricken with a sudden panic, perhaps also with remorse, he had fled either to another colony or into the far interior.

That he had not quitted South Australia I speedily ascertained; for upon making inquiries at the port, I found that the only ship that had left the harbour for the preceding four-and-twenty hours was the *Kiama*, bound for Melbourne, and that no one at all answering McDonald's description had taken a passage in her.

I did not care to prosecute my search further at present, for if I could have discovered his whereabouts, the magistrates would not have issued a warrant for his re-arrest; so I determined to set about strengthening the evidence before I again assumed the offensive.

The only things I had at present to go upon were the scraps of half-consumed leather, and the nails that I had fished out of the fire. I knew that the leather belonged to a thick labourer's pair of boots, and the nails were the *hob* and *clinker* nails pertaining to such boots. I had dug one of the footprints out of the garden pathway, where it had

been embedded in the stiff clay, which had taken its impression as clearly as wax could do the wards of a lock, and I now set to work to fit in my nails into this clay model.

To make my readers more clearly understand this I must explain to them that clinker nails are such as surround the edges of the sole and heel of a boot of this class. Their heads are nearly square, and almost as large as the smallest size of dice. Hob nails, on the contrary, are round-headed, and are generally arranged in some fantastic design on the flat of the sole, such as a diamond or a star. Thus it is evident that the clinker nails would mark the outline and size of the boot, and that if I could make half the clinker and hob nails that I had got from McDonald's grate fit into the corresponding holes in the clay footprint dug from the garden pathway, it would go far to prove that the boots to which they belonged were those worn by the man who had crossed the garden, scaled the spout, entered the window, and murdered the young girl at the lodging-house in Brownlow Street.

I was an hour at this little job, but it was crowned with complete success. The indents in my clay model were every one filled up, and it had taken exactly half my nails (forty-eight) to effect this. To me the boot mystery was solved.

I now turned my attention to the pistol, and surveyed it carefully, though with very slight hopes of discovering anything condemnatory in that. A blow from a blunt instrument is difficult to trace to *the* instrument causing it. In the instance of a knife or dagger stab, you may discover a weapon of the kind that fits the wound. In a case of death from a bullet you may find a rifle or pistol carrying a similar sized ball. In both cases such a discovery would be valuable evidence; but in the present instance the deceased might have been killed by a blow from *any* blunt instrument—a hammer, a fire-iron, or a ruler; so I could not convince myself that McDonald's pistol would throw any light upon the subject.

I was just about to return the cumbrous old weapon to the drawer from whence I had taken it, when I observed three or four short hairs sticking to the rough ribbed stock. They were all about the fourth of an inch in length, of a pale

golden colour, and might possibly have once belonged to a human eyebrow.

I picked them off carefully, wrapped them in a piece of silk paper, and sallied out to obtain the loan of a very powerful microscope.

Now it happened that for the past two years I had given considerable attention to comparative anatomy, particularly to the structure of the hair as it appears under the microscope. To the naked eye, indeed, all hair presents a pretty similar appearance, except as it is long or short, dark or fair, straight or curly, coarse or fine. Placed under a microscope, however, other peculiarities are noticeable. The white man's hair is seen to be round, whereas the black man's is oval. The mouse's fur is apparently jointed, the bat's jagged, &c. Every species of animal has hair of a peculiar kind; but in the human race the character of the hair varies according to the part of the body upon which it grows. You can distinguish a hair plucked from the eyebrow from a hair of the moustache, an eyelash from a hair of the beard or whisker.

In the present instance, although I could not get the loan of a sufficiently strong microscope, I obtained from an optician permission to use one that stood in his shop, and submitting my three hairs to its powerful lens, I soon discovered that they were from the *human eyebrow*, and *had been bruised*.

Making a note to this effect, I refolded the hairs in the paper which had previously contained them, returned them to my pocket, and thanking the optician for his courtesy, quitted the shop.

In my opinion the guilt of McDonald was now clear beyond a doubt. The case stood thus:—the deceased had been killed by a blow with some blunt instrument on the eyebrow. The murder had not been committed for the sake of robbery, as the purse, watch, and rings had been left on the table untouched. It must therefore have been done for the sake of revenge; and McDonald, as a rejected suitor, was the most likely man to seek that vengeance. Then the hair and eyebrows of the murdered girl were of a beautiful golden brown, and the hairs I had picked from the stock of



McDonald's pistol were of a precisely similar colour, and I had proved them to be eyebrow hairs and *bruised*. The clinker and hob-nails, too, evidently belonged to the boots of the man who had crossed the lodging-house garden and broken into the girl's room ; and here were these same nails and burnt shoe-leather found in the fireplace of McDonald's sitting-room. The mere fact of his trying to burn these old shoes was calculated to arouse grave suspicions, as it was the very last way of getting rid of them that a man possessing the sense of smell would adopt.

I went to a justice forthwith, acquainted him with the additional evidence that I had obtained, and pressed him to grant me another warrant for the clown's arrest.

He at length complied, and I then made him promise to keep his having done so a secret for a while, or that else I might find it a very difficult matter to discover McDonald's whereabouts and bring him to justice.

No sooner had I fortified myself with this warrant than I began to make an attempt at recapture ; but a couple of days' investigation convinced me that if I would lay hands on "the great little Borello" again, I must hit upon some scheme to entice him back to Adelaide, instead of myself going to seek him in the country. I accordingly penned a paragraph for the Adelaide daily paper, which ran, as nearly as I can recollect, as follows :—

"THE MYSTERIOUS MURDER IN BROWNLOW STREET.—After a week's untiring efforts on the part of the police, there exists a hope that the assassin of poor Madlle. Louise Duroc will yet be discovered and brought to justice. The detective force are in possession of information which seems clearly to inculcate one Charles Henley, formerly a banking clerk in Adelaide, who sailed for England in the barque *Cornubia* the day after the murder. A riding whip with a heavy silver handle, bearing the crest and initials of Mr. Henley, has been discovered in an interstice of the chimney of the bedchamber occupied by deceased, and a witness has come forward who states that he saw him talking with her outside the circus the night that the murder was perpetrated.

Upon these as well as other grounds of suspicion, the authorities feel convinced that Mr. Henley is the murderer; and Mr. Brooke, chief of the detective staff, starts by the mail steamer to-morrow for England, where doubtless he will arrive some weeks before the *Cornubia*, as that vessel is reported to be a slow sailer. Thus Henley will be arrested before he can have a chance of landing, and he will be brought back to Adelaide to stand his trial in the first ship that quits England for this port after his arrest."

Two days after the insertion of the above paragraph I drew up an advertisement to the following effect:—

"WANTED, the address of MR. JOSEPH McDONALD, late of Mary Street, Hampstead Road, London, who left England about eight years since, and who is believed to be now travelling with a circus in the Australian colonies. If his address is forwarded to, or if he will call at, the office of Mr. James Robinson, solicitor, 19, Hindley Street, Adelaide, who is acting under power of attorney for the late Mr. Fergus McDonald, of Maidstone, Kent, he will hear of something greatly to his advantage."

This advertisement I ordered to be inserted in the same paper for a week, and sent copies of it for publication in the Melbourne and Sydney papers.

I had every hope that this stratagem would succeed in bringing Master McDonald back to Adelaide, for the former paragraph would show him that all suspicion as to the murder was directed into another channel, and that no one would for a moment doubt his innocence; while the latter advertisement would appeal strongly to his cupidity, and, in fact, present a bait which, to one less proof against temptation than the good St. Anthony would be next to impossible to refrain from biting at.

As for the chance of his not seeing these notices, I did not regard that, for I knew by experience that most criminals read attentively every newspaper they can lay hold of, in which it is at all likely that any paragraph may concern themselves; for they are anxious to know as early and as exactly as possible

what is said and known about themselves or their crime, so that they may act accordingly. I was therefore quite as certain that, if living, McDonald would read the paragraph and advertisement, as I was that I had written them, and events proved that my conviction was correct.

Of course, before framing the above advertisement I took care to learn some of McDonald's antecedents ; and the Mr. Fergus McDonald whose name I borrowed for the occasion was an uncle of the clown, a very wealthy old bachelor, who, at the time I made so free with his name, was very probably enjoying as perfect health as myself.

Some of these facts I gathered from the proprietor of the circus, others I obtained from more secret but not less authentic sources. The solicitor named was a personal friend of my own, who had volunteered to aid me in the intrigue. Of course the paragraph concerning Henley was entirely a fabrication.

Nine days after the first insertion of the advertisement I received information that McDonald had returned to Adelaide. I knew that it was past Mr. Robinson's office hours, so I doubted not but that if he called at that gentleman's chambers, finding them closed, he would make a point of going there again the first thing the next morning. I therefore merely ordered two of my aides to watch him closely, but by no means to let him catch them at it, and then waiting until it was quite dark, I took a car and drove to Mr. Robinson's private residence, where we arranged that he should be at his chambers half an hour earlier than usual on the following morning, and hide me in a large cupboard, from whence I could spring out and capture my man at a moment's notice.

Well, the next day came, and this little plot was carried into execution. Just as the clock struck ten, a step in the outer office was audible, and we heard a man asking the clerk if Mr. Robinson was in ? I at once rushed to my cupboard, for I recognised McDonald's voice, and the next moment that worthy was duly ushered into the private office.

The solicitor bowed, requested him to be seated, and then getting up, locked the door and put the key in his pocket, observing as he did so, " My dear Mr. McDonald, the busi-

ness relating to your deceased uncle's affairs may require a long interview, so I take this precaution against being disturbed by importunate clients," with which words he resumed his chair.

From my place of concealment I could, through a crack in the cupboard door, see all that passed in the office. Mr. Robinson had reseated himself with a bland smile, and McDonald fidgeted himself about in his chair, anxiously awaiting an explanation from the lawyer. A few moments' pause ensued, which I took advantage of to note the appearance of the ci-devant clown. He was stylishly dressed, sported a silver-headed cane, a heavy Colonial gold Albert chain, and wore two or three costly rings on his fingers. He looked well up in condition, too; his face was ruddy with health, his hair, whiskers, and moustache carefully oiled and curled; and though decidedly a *little* man (he could not have stood more than five feet three in his boots), he never looked so *big* in his life.

"You see I have taken the very earliest opportunity of calling upon you, Mr. Robinson," he said.

"Yes, Mr. McDonald, I wish one-half of my clients came on so happy an errand; you are a most fortunate young man. It isn't every one that has rich relatives at their finger ends," replied the attorney, turning over and over his papers as though searching for a document.

"Did my uncle make his will long before his death, sir?" asked the clown.

"My dear sir, he made no will, he died intestate; accordingly you are possessed of the whole of his property as his heir-at-law."

"And his moneys?"

"Yes, and his moneys; everything, in fact, that he died possessed of."

"The devil I am!" exclaimed "the great little Borello," springing from his chair and beginning to dance about the room, while he kept shouting, "What did he die worth?" "What did he die worth?"

"Forty thousand pounds in the three per cent. Consols, twenty thousand ditto in East India stock, nine thousand in

railway debentures, ten thousand pounds on policy of insurance in 'The London Equitable,' freehold estates at Maidstone, Kent, and Blackheath, valued at two thousand a year rental, cash in London and Westminster Bank at time of decease eight hundred and fifty-six pounds seven shillings and——"

"Stop—stop—stop! impossible! nonsense!" exclaimed the clown, suddenly recovering himself after a double somersault, and with open mouth and wondering eyes regarding the attorney. "Why, man, my uncle, rich as he was, could never have saved a quarter of that money. There must be a mistake somewhere."

"There is a mistake somewhere, Mr. McDonald," I calmly observed, as I emerged from the closet.

"The deuce! Mr. Brooke here in Adelaide? Why, I thought you were half way to England by this time, in pursuit of the murderer Henley," exclaimed McDonald, endeavouring to assume an off-hand tone.

"You see it's a mistake all round, mate, for the fact is that I've stayed in South Australia on purpose to capture the murderer McDonald," I replied, coolly.

"But my uncle—his property—the advertisement in the *Register*,—what the fury does it all mean?"

"A neat little trick to induce you to put your head into the lion's mouth, that's all: you're my prisoner."

"Your prisoner? Fudge! You arrested me once before, and could prove nothing; why make a fool of yourself again?" exclaimed the clown, dodging me around the table.

"Since then additional evidence has been obtained, which warrants a fresh arrest; therefore surrender yourself quietly, or I shall resort to force," I said.

"Take that, and be hanged to you; two can play at that game," was the reply; and quickly drawing a small pistol from his pocket, he fired it point-blank at my face.

Providentially the cap missed fire; had it not, I should never have lived to relate this tale. Before he could recap his weapon, I was down upon him. A fierce struggle ensued; for though McDonald was a little man, he was very muscular, and as slippery as an eel. Robinson made no effort to assist

me, either from nervousness or a love of fair play, I don't know which, so I give him the credit of the doubt.

For some minutes we struggled furiously, upsetting chairs, stools, desks, and ink-bottles. At last I succeeded in tripping the clown up, and throwing him heavily on his back. Before he could rise, I planted my knee on his chest, and put the handcuffs on him. I then suffered him to scramble to his feet, and found him quiet enough. A cab was soon summoned by one of the clerks, and pushing my prisoner into it, we drove to the police-station.

The next morning McDonald was taken before a magistrate, who, upon the evidence of the footprints and the bruised hair, committed him for trial at the approaching sittings of the criminal court.

The day previous to the one fixed for his trial, he tried to escape from his cell by a violent and sudden assault upon the turnkey who brought him his supper, but the effort was not crowned with success.

When the day of trial arrived, and the case of "*The Queen v. McDonald*" was called on, the supreme criminal court was crammed to suffocation. The calmest face amid that multitude was the prisoner's. The trial lasted six hours. I had a great difficulty in making the jury believe that the three golden hairs found on the stock of the pistol could be ascertained to be "bruised hairs from a human eyebrow," but the evidence of an eminent naturalist, happening fully to substantiate mine on the subject, and upon the assurance of the judge that such a discovery was perfectly within the reach of natural science, removed their doubts. The evidence of the clinker and hob nails was, however, much more satisfactory and intelligible to them. After being locked up for three hours, they returned into court, and, amid a breathless silence, the dread verdict of "**GUILTY**" was delivered through their foreman.

The judge now asked the prisoner whether "he had any reason to urge that the sentence of the court should not be passed upon him," but McDonald merely shook his head.

His honour then assumed the black cap, and delivered his

judgment, which the prisoner listened to with an appearance of the most perfect apathy. Not a muscle of his face quivered; nothing about him indicated that the sentence being pronounced was the span of his life. It seemed as if his crime and his condemnation did not concern him in the least degree. As he was removed from court his only words were, "What is to be will be. We are all in the hands of fate."

At a later date, when informed that a petition he had forwarded to the Government had been rejected, he preserved the same stoicism and indifference.

At five o'clock on the evening preceding his execution the gaol chaplain visited McDonald in his cell, reminded him that he had but a few hours to live, and urged him to confession and repentance. The prisoner, who was fast asleep when the chaplain entered, awoke with a cry, and sprang to his feet. He listened attentively to the worthy pastor's exhortations, and at length suddenly exclaimed, "Yes, I will confess. I did murder Louise Duroc, and I deserve this fate. I now feel the horror of my crime!"

He then made a full revelation, stating that "Mademoiselle Duroc had joined the circus at San Francisco, that he had from the first loved her deeply, and that until the arrival of the circus in Adelaide—a period of eleven months—she had accepted his addresses. Here, however, she had accused him of being a *roué* and a hard drinker, and insisted on breaking off the engagement. A day later she consented to marry a young man, the son of her lodging-house keeper, whom she had not known for more than a week. She had informed McDonald in a letter of her intention to marry this young man, but he, fancying that she was not in earnest, begged and prayed of her to revoke her determination. She repelled his overtures with scorn and sarcasm, and he threatened her that if she would not marry him she should never wed any one else. When he quitted her that night he determined to be avenged, and watching her bedroom window until the light was extinguished, he proceeded to the circus, procured a large pair of 'property' boots, and then returning to the lodging-house, he crossed the garden from the right of way, mounted to the ill-fated girl's window by means of the waterpipe, and enter-

ing the room dragged her out of bed—with one hand on her mouth to prevent her from crying for help,—and then felled her to the floor with a blow from the stock of his pistol. To his surprise he found that the first blow had killed her; a fact which he attested by feeling her pulse and heart, both of which had ceased to beat. Satisfied by the extent of his revenge, he now quickly made good his escape from the house and returned to his lodgings, where he sought forgetfulness of the terrible crime he had committed in drink. He was soon afterwards arrested, taken before the magistrates, and discharged. After quitting the circus, which he did under the impulse of a sudden panic, McDonald had gone into the interior,—so far that he would have been tolerably safe from pursuit, had he not, unfortunately for himself, been unable to abstain from visiting the shanties to glance at the papers. On an unlucky day he noticed the paragraph I had concocted concerning ‘Henley, and my trip to England to arrest him;’ and a few days later he came across the advertisement for his discovery. Cajoled and thrown off his guard by these, as I had anticipated that he would be, he discarded his fears and set out at once for Adelaide, which city, after a week’s journey through the bush, and sundry adventures on the way, he safely reached. So anxious was he to learn what ‘the something greatly to his advantage’ was, that he called at the lawyer’s within an hour of his arrival in town. He was too late, the office was closed. The first thing the following morning he called again—to find, poor fellow, that ‘the something to his advantage’ was a prison cell, the dock, and the gibbet.”

After his confession to the chaplain, McDonald appeared to be happier in mind. He slept very soundly the last night of his life, and an hour previously to his execution he made a hearty breakfast on bacon and eggs, which he had scarcely concluded before the officials entered his cell to conduct him to the place of doom. It was about ten o’clock when McDonald mounted to the platform; his face was still calm, but very pale. A dense crowd was collected to witness his execution, but he seemed to take no notice of it. He shook hands with the chaplain, and thanked him warmly for his



unremitting kindness and attention. He then felt the rope, and said "that it was very rough."

Before the executioner adjusted the noose, he turned to the crowd and exclaimed in a loud, clear, and firm voice, "I am willing to die, for I richly deserve this terrible doom and public shame, which I hope may partly atone for my sin. I have only one caution to give you all : Beware of ungovernable passion, and a desire for a retaliation of wrong ; those feelings brought me here !" Then he added, solemnly, " May God have mercy on my soul !"

His arms were now pinioned, the noose adjusted, the white cap drawn over his face. A second later the drop fell—a jerk, a gurgle, and all was over,—Joseph McDonald had ceased to live, and human justice was at length satisfied.

## KING RUM TUM'S GHOST.

IN one of the quietest streets of the singularly quiet city of Adelaide there stood, in the year 1855, a three-storied desolate house, that had not possessed an occupant for more than five years. Had I come across such a house in London, or any English town, I should have set it down as being a very old house, a soot-begrimed, leaky-roofed centenarian at the very least; but in Adelaide, where at that time the very oldest stone structure could not have been more than twenty years in existence, I could only regard it as a prematurely aged house, a house whose days were numbered, whose span of life was rapidly drawing to a close. Had this house been a man, I should have concluded him to be a monomaniac, a hypochondriac, or something of that sort; as a house, of course, I could do nothing of the sort. I have before said that it was three stories high, and it happened to stand between two heavy, squally-looking buildings, possessing only one story each; consequently, a beholder might easily acquire the impression that its altitude had been caused by the presence of its sluggish neighbours against its sides. To conclude my description, it had four lanky chimneys, which had apparently eschewed smoking for years; and eight windows in the front; namely, two on the ground-floor, and an allowance of three to each of the floors above. These windows had most of their panes broken, but were all fortified on the inside with closed rickety shutters, which, if they excluded light and air, certainly frustrated the curiosity of any passer by to obtain a view of the interior.

I might go on describing the peculiarities of this strange building until I had filled pages of my manuscript, could I

but afford the space. If any of my readers are familiar with Red Lion Square, Holborn; or Cumberland Square, Clerkenwell, they have only to imagine a house transferred from one of those localities, and plumped down suddenly into the middle of a new colonial city, and they can picture to themselves No. 19, South Charlotte Street to the very life.

During the first twelve months that I was stationed at Adelaide I used to wonder why this house was never let; and as often as I happened to pass it, which was pretty frequently, I used to glance up at the windows, fancying I might see in one of them a little square card with "THIS HOUSE TO LET" figuring upon it in bold black type; or else great yellow posters glaring from its dark walls, notifying that it was to be sold by auction. Neither of these phenomena occurred, month after month passed away, and still the gloomy tenement remained uninhabited; and this was the more strange because, at that time, house property was at a premium in Adelaide.

On the evening of the twenty-fourth of June (I recollect the date because it had been a very cold, windy day, and nearly every one I met had made the remark that it was Midsummer day in England) I and a couple of friends sat beside a bright gum-wood fire, in my private office at the detective station; and as I felt inclined for a carouse, business being rather dead, and not anticipating an interruption, we manufactured a jorum of punch, filled our pipes, and prepared to spend a right merry evening. Yarns were the order of the night, and after two or three choice ones had been spun, I remarked that I fancied there was an old house in Charlotte Street which, could it but speak, would be able to relate as absorbing reminiscences as any that had yet been given.

"Ah, you mean the *haunted* house, No. 19," observed little Wiffles, my aide.

I confessed that I did mean No. 19, though I was unaware that it bore the reputation of being haunted.

"Ah! ah! ah!" laughed John Abell, the doctor of our force. "That don't portray your sharpness, Mr. Brooke. You've been here now a whole year, and by this time you

should know everything, from the most secret thoughts of a minister of finance to what Mother Meddles opposite puts in her pork pies. A pretty detective you, indeed!"

"Laugh away, doctor, but spin the yarn also, for I'm as ignorant of aught that concerns the house in Charlotte Street as the man in the moon can be," I said.

"What! never heard of King Rum Tum?"

"Never a word."

"Well, then, fill up your glasses, boys," exclaimed the doctor, "and as you all doubtless know the story with the exception of this ignorant Melbournite, I will make the narrative as short and to the point as possible."

So saying, Jack Abell took a sip at his punch, relit his pipe, crossed his legs, and between his whiffs related the following narrative, which he facetiously called—

#### YE HISTORIE OF YE KING OF BURRANAGUCK.

Twenty years ago the population of this important colony, instead of being computable as at present by tens of thousands, scarcely numbered a hundred souls. Adelaide itself could boast of but nine houses, instead of fourteen hundred as at present, and the space now occupied by our paved and macadamized streets was open bush or dense scrub, the hunting-ground of the black fellow. The aboriginals were then very numerous, and were not the drunken degraded beings they have since become. They were divided into different tribes, each tribe having a king of its own. The natives who occupied the country for a radius of many miles around where we now sit were ruled over by a gigantic black fellow, called by them King Raum-tume-tume, meaning in their language "Warrior strong strong;" but the colonists, unable to pronounce the name, abbreviated it into Rum Tum Tum, or Rum Tum, and as King Rum Tum, the strong warrior, was generally known amongst the whites.

While the colonists were weak in numbers and the blacks very numerous, the former took care to keep on good terms with their sable brethren, and overlooked the numerous acts of petty thieving which daily took place. At length, how-

ever, as they grew more numerous, and learnt that the native was a poor, timid, easily scared creature, they assumed the high hand, and without training or teaching, the black was expected to understand and conform to the white man's code of morals. For a sheep or two stolen from a run, or an axe or piece of cloth from a store, the aboriginal, to whom purloining was no crime, would if caught be whipped like a dog, or imprisoned and half starved. If the theft was of greater magnitude a general raid would be made on the black inhabitants with dogs and guns, and if resistance was offered blood would sometimes be shed like water. Seldom was any retaliation offered by the natives, though sometimes a shepherd would be found murdered in his hut; or a traveller's skeleton, picked clean by the native dogs, be discovered far away in the silent bush, transfixed to the earth by the black man's assagai or javelin.

In the year 1840, however, the tribe of which King Rum Tum was the head was suspected of levying very frequent and rather heavy black-mail on the extensive sheep runs of Burranaguck, a station some miles to the south of us. The station hands were accordingly collected, the dogs unleashed, and a fresh raid made upon the unhappy aboriginals, who vainly pleaded ignorance of the fate of the missing sheep. Although none of them were actually slain, they were beaten and ridden under foot, until at length King Rum Tum was so angered at seeing his favourite wife (the old boy had seven of them) lashed with a heavy stockwhip, each cut of which brought blood, that he hurled his boomerang at the fellow who was inflicting the punishment, and killed him on the spot.

It happened to be the owner of Burranaguck who was killed, and King Rum Tum was immediately captured, taken to Adelaide, and arraigned before the Justices of the Peace as his murderer. The result was that he was committed for trial, and as the prison was not yet built, the Justices experienced some difficulty in finding a place wherein to confine him.

Now it happened that a certain Miles Humphrey had just erected a large house in the then rapidly rising town, but on

the very day that it was completed, for some unaccountable reason, he committed suicide ; and as he was a lone man, had made no will, and had left no clue whereby any of his relatives or friends could be discovered, Government appropriated his property ; and as his new house was the strongest and most secure in the town, they imprisoned King Rum Tum in the top story thereof, defended the windows with stout iron bars, and fortified the doors with heavy bolts and chains.

Here the unhappy captive pined until his trial, a month later, when he was found guilty of murder, and sentenced to be hanged on the third day after the passing of the sentence. He was taken back to his prison, where with inhuman barbarity he was forbidden a last interview with any of his wives or children. At length the morning fixed for the execution arrived, the gallows had been duly erected, and a large crowd collected to witness the spectacle. The executioner and other officials repaired to the King's place of captivity to escort him to the scaffold, but when they ascended to the third floor, and entered the room where he was imprisoned, a terrible sight met their gaze. King Rum Tum was sitting bolt upright upon his haunches in the furthest corner of the room ; his head was thrown back, and covered with an old cotton handkerchief. He made no reply when spoken to, and so the executioner advanced and snatched the handkerchief from his face. A glance showed that he was dead. His face was terribly swollen, and of a dull leaden hue ; his eyes seemed to be starting from their sockets ; his mouth was half open, and smeared with blood. Upon examination it was discovered that he had committed suicide by *swallowing his own tongue*, which he must have effected by rolling it up in a ball, and then by mere strength of will and sinew forcing it backwards down his windpipe.

Thus did King Rum Tum cheat the gallows. Of course, the body was promptly buried, but from that day the fate of the house where he had died was sealed. It is now fifteen years since that tragic event occurred, but it has never had a tenant since, and for four or five years the present owner, who bought it from the Government for a

mere song, has not thought it worth while to announce it to be let.

\* \* \* \* \*

As the doctor concluded his tale, he refilled his glass from the punch-bowl, and emptied it at a draught.

"Whatever objection you may have to *ghosts*, you evidently have none to *spirits*, Abell," I observed, with a laugh. "Your story is a good one; but do the townsfolk really believe this house to be haunted?"

"I believe you, my boy. Half Adelaide is ready to swear to it; the very children will not play within a good stone's throw of it after dusk, and not one grown person in a hundred would set foot in it after nightfall, were they paid their own weight in gold for such a deed of daring."

"And all this because a poor devil of a black fellow swallowed his tongue in it at least twenty years ago," I observed, with a burst of laughter that I could not refrain from.

"There I beg your pardon; not because a poor devil of a black fellow, as you irreverently term his Majesty King Rum Tum, swallowed his tongue in the house; but because he persists in returning to this sublunary sphere every night, to revisit the scene of that notable exploit. They say that, in company with the first proprietor of the house, who, as I told you before, committed suicide on the very day that the structure was completed, he walks about the empty chambers every night, 'mid the clattering of chains and all the noises of Eblis, and when day begins to dawn with most unearthly wails they return to the grave."

"'Pon my word, I can't look *grave* whilst you narrate such superstitious nonsense, doctor; besides, I don't believe in ghosts."

"Nor do I," said the surgeon; "but yet I feel sure that there is some mystery connected with the old place that may be attributable to natural causes, but which will be difficult to solve." Then glancing at his watch, he observed, "It is time for me to be off; I see it's five minutes to eleven o'clock," and shaking hands all round, he hastily took his departure. The rest of the party broke up a few minutes

later, and before the clock struck midnight I myself was in bed and sound asleep.

The following day ushered in a more busy season for us. A desperate murder was perpetrated. A week later a heavy fraud on the Bank of South Australia was practised; then came two or three embezzlement cases, and for some time my hands were so full of work that my thoughts never once reverted to the haunted house, or to the doctor's story concerning it. The above matters were scarcely disposed of when a new mystery arose which baffled all my cunning for weeks. This was no less than the immense quantity of illicit and overproof whiskey that was in use throughout the city and neighbourhood. The Customs were in a state of fury and bewilderment about it, and kept urging me to use every endeavour to solve the enigma and bring the distillers to justice as speedily as possible. I certainly made every effort to do so, but I must own that I was never so thoroughly at fault in my life. I had an idea for some time that the confounded stuff was manufactured in the country somewhere, but if so the spot was past finding. Every suspicious locality in Adelaide, and for a radius of twenty-five miles around it, was searched again and again, but all without avail, and at last I gave up the matter in despair, though I took care not to say so.

One evening, Mike Daley, one of my aides, with a face as pale as death, rushed into my private office, where I was smoking a pipe, and exclaimed wildly, "I've seen them, I've seen them; it is all true about that house in Charlotte Street!"

"What's all true, Daley?" I asked.

"Why, every word that the doctor told us the other night. I've seen King Rum Tum and the fellow who built the house, and then killed himself."

"You've been having a nobbler too many, Daley. What the deuce do you mean?"

"Mean! why, that a quarter of an hour or so ago I saw King Rum Tum and Miles Humphrey in a room of that very house, sitting on three-legged stools, and drinking raw spirit against each other, as though they were doing it for a wager."



"Sit down, man, and tell your yarn at length," I said, becoming interested in the matter.

"Well," began Daley, "you see, I was just on my way home to the station when, in passing down Charlotte Street, I cast my eyes up at the haunted house and began to fancy that I should like to inspect it a little closer; after, therefore, I had almost stared it out of countenance from the street, I slipped down a little right-of-way to the left of it, and got in its rear by clambering over an old tottering wall into a weed-grown garden. If possible, the house looks more desolate and weird from the back than from the front, and the windows are blinded in a similar manner—in some places by closed shutters, in others by boards nailed across. While I was looking up at these windows I fancied that I saw a glint of light through a crack in one of the shutters; the longer I looked at it the more certain I felt that it was really a light, and no freak of the imagination. I am a pretty good climber, and, aided by the rough outer stonework, I clambered up to the window which was on the second floor, and through the narrow fissure could see into the room."

"Well, and what did you see?"

"Why, what I told you—King Rum Tum and Miles Humphrey hob-nobbing together as comfortable as could be."

"Did you notice their look or dress?"

"I did; Miles Humphrey was attired in a suit of rusty black, and wore a cabbage-tree hat drawn over his eyes; his face was quite as white as that whitewashed wall. The king wore a ragged pair of plaid trousers, had an old blanket wrapped around him, and had no shoes to his feet."

"Was his face black?"

"His face, hands, and feet were black as soot, but his hair and eyebrows were white. He was the most hideous old fellow that I ever saw."

"But hang it, man, how do you know that these forms were ghosts! Perhaps they were living men, and met together in that old house to plan something unlawful."

"Not a bit of it. Didn't Miles Humphrey hang himself?" asked Daley, crossly.

"I believe he did, but what of that?" I rejoined.

"Why, this; his ghost had a livid ring around his long, scraggy throat where the rope had encircled it; and as for the black fellow, a narrow red ribbon encircled his neck, to which was suspended a brass plate in the shape of a half-moon. As it lay on his chest and glittered in the candle-light, I read the words 'RUM TUM 'TUM, KING OF BURRANAGUCK;' they were engraved upon it."

"By Jove, it's very strange, Daley, I own, but did you hear them talk?" I asked.

"Not a word, they took their drinks in silence. I watched them until my blood ran cold, and I trembled so that I feared I should fall into the garden below; to prevent which I descended as quickly as I could and returned here as fast as my legs would carry me."

"And you still adhere to the opinion that the two men you saw were inhabitants of the spirit world?"

"Faith, I'm sure that they're none other," was the confident reply.

"Let me see, it is now just a quarter to twelve o'clock. I never yet heard of a ghost retiring to his underground dwelling before the midnight hour, so just rouse up Wiffles and Black, and tell them to dress like lightning, for I'm determined to make an effort to solve the mystery of that house at once. You must accompany us."

Daley looked rather astonished at my sudden energy, but an impatient wave of the hand caused him to vanish with alacrity to arouse his mates. In less than five minutes we were all on our way to Charlotte Street.

It was a bright moonlight night, and never had I before fancied the haunted house to look so mysterious and ghost-like. Towering high above the surrounding edifices, it threw a dark and ominous shadow across the street. Not a glimpse of light was visible at either of the front windows, and placing Black and Wiffles to guard the street door, I told Daley to lead me to the spot from whence he had first observed the light in the second-floor window. This was soon accomplished, but it was no longer visible. I scrambled up to the very window through which Daley had witnessed

the two spectres, but it was all dark within, and the only noise audible was the pattering of the rats as they gambolled and chased each other through the empty rooms. I tried to throw up the window-sash, but the rusty slip bolt defied my efforts. I then cautiously thrust my arm through broken pane after broken pane, hoping to be able to open the closed shutters, but found them to be nailed as well as barred, and so effectually that it would have taken some ten minutes to effect an entry, and even then it could not have been done without a great deal of noise. I therefore descended to the garden, but unwilling to give up the adventure without a further effort, I again ascended and tried three other windows in succession, but with equal ill-success, until I gave the thing up—for that night, at all events—in despair; and returning to Daley, we joined our mates in Charlotte Street, who stated that they had been watching the house closely ever since we had quitted them, but had noticed nothing suspicious, and were quite certain that no one had left it by the front door or windows since they had been on guard.

As nothing more could be effected until the next day, we returned to the station.

The following morning I disguised myself, discovered the residence of the proprietor of the haunted house, and called upon him.

He was a tall, lanky man, with a sullen look, but oily manners. He kept an inn called the "Dublin Arms," but he was a Yankee for all that, and had never been in the Emerald Isle in his life.

"Good morning, Mr. Snakes," I exclaimed, as he entered the private parlour whither I had been ushered upon stating that my business was private.

"Good morning, sir; good morning. I believe you wished to speak with me," he said, favouring me with a searching glance as he spoke.

My get-up as a well-to-do squatter was, however, too complete to be penetrated, and assuming an off-hand air I came to the point at once with "I understand that you are the landlord of No. 19, Charlotte Street, and that you want to let it?"

"I—I am the proprietor of the house you name, but as to letting it, I really don't know what to say; I've no particular desire to do so," he answered, with rather a confused air.

"Ah! ah! You say that in order to run me up in the rent, Master Snakes; but I'm a rich man, and don't care to haggle for such a trifle as a few pounds a month. I've taken a fancy to the house, and you must let me have it. Of course you would rather let it than have it empty on your hands?"

"Oh, without doubt it's unpleasant to have an empty tenement bringing in no rent, but the fact is, sir, that the place is so damp and out of repair, that it would cost nearly a thousand pounds to make it habitable."

"Well, let me have it on a twenty-one years' lease, and I'll expend a thousand pounds to put it to rights."

I noticed an angry glitter in the tall Yankee's eyes, but his voice was more oily and persuasive than ever as he said, "I'm an honest man, sir, though not a very rich one. I can't make up my mind to cheat you, though you're sorely tempting me to do it. The fact is, before you had been in that house a week you would be ten times more anxious to get out than you are now to enter it. Although it is my house, and consequently much against my interests to say so, yet my conscience obliges me to tell you that it is damp, draughty, badly built, and terribly out of repair. It is, moreover, known to be a haunted house, and you would not get a servant, male or female, to stay in it one night, were you to offer them all your wealth to do so."

"A haunted house? By Jove! that makes me more anxious than ever to become its occupier. I always longed to live in a haunted house."

"But the servants, sir?"

"Oh, hang the servants! I'll bring some down from my station at Coonaburra who will fear neither ghost nor devil."

"Ah, sir, you won't hear reason," groaned the landlord.

"Not I, but perhaps you will. I offer a rent of a hundred and fifty pounds a year for a term of twenty-one years, and will expend a thousand pounds in repairs prior to entry, as well as pay all rates and taxes," I said.

"Ah, I could not let it on those terms."

"Make it two hundred a year then, and come and show me over the rooms at once," I persisted.

Snakes bit his lip until the blood spurted, and then looked scared lest I had perceived it. He stammered, hesitated, and at last blurted out, "I've lost the key of the door; and besides, am too busy to leave the hotel to-day. Call again, if you're passing, towards the end of the week, sir."

I saw that a prolonging of the controversy would only awaken Master Snakes' suspicions, without effecting any corresponding good. I therefore pretended to be satisfied with his excuse, and promising to call again as he requested, took my leave.

I was highly satisfied at the result of my pumping. I knew that six months previously Snakes had offered to let this house at *thirty pounds a year*, rather than keep it on his hands. *Now* he did not care to take seven times that amount; the conclusion naturally possessed me that he found the old house more profitable empty than let, and as a natural consequence next arose the mental query, "In what manner could he make it more profitable?" The bolted and nailed windows seemed to answer that it was not by means altogether honest and above-board; and then, like a flash of lightning, it crossed my mind that perchance the landlord of "The Dublin Arms" was a whiskey distiller, and that in this old house might be manufactured the large quantities of illicit spirit that had deluged Adelaide and its neighbourhood for the past three months, and defied the police as well as the excise to discover its makers.

When I got to the station I imparted my suspicions to my mates, for I determined at any risk to solve the mystery of the haunted house, and the identity of Miles Humphrey and King Rum Tum that very night.

I sent two of the force—in mufti, of course—to watch the house, with orders to arrest any one who might pass in or out. Directly it was dark, I doubled the number of watchers, telling them to be wary and watch every approach, and not be content with merely keeping an eye on the doors; for I fancied; that if my suspicions were correct, the persons who

visited the lone house would obtain ingress by any means but the legitimate ones. If anything mysterious happened previous to eleven o'clock, one of them was to return at once and report to me. At that hour I resolved to repair thither and effect an entry by hook or by crook.

Hour flew by after hour; at last half-past ten came, and I was about to equip myself for the adventure, when in ran Wiffles.

"Well, what's up, mate?" said I.

"Why, they've just entered the house, sir."

"Who have?"

"Why, God knows; Daley swears they're ghosts, but I guess they are men. You know, sir, we were on guard at the back, and I was lying down in the garden under the shadow of the tall weeds, keeping a sharp look-out on the house, when I heard a rustle close by, and a black man with a white woolly head skiddered by me as if old Nick was after him. I never saw a fellow go at such a pace in my life, and before I could make up my mind whether to pursue him or not I saw him and another fellow, I can't guess where *he* sprang from, apparently glide up the side of the house to the third story, and then dart in through a window."

"Did Daley see all this too?"

"He didn't see the black fellow pass me, because he was away too far to the left, but he saw the two figures glide up the wall and pop in through the window."

"And he swears they're ghosts, does he?" I laughed.

"He does indeed."

"Then, if I don't mistake, he shall have the honour of locking up two ghosts in the police cells to-morrow. Come, let us be off. You shall accompany me into this haunted house, for Daley's too superstitious and timid. Have you your revolver with you?"

"Yes, I'm all right."

"Wait a minute, then, and I'll be with you," I said; and going into my bedroom I took my revolver out of its case, examined the caps, and placed it in my pocket, for I did not know how many desperadoes there might be in the house, and there is no saying more true than "discretion is the better part of valour."

It was just eleven o'clock when we left the station, and five minutes' brisk walking brought us in view of the haunted house. Turning down the little right-of-way we came full tilt against Daley, who, dressed as a mechanic, stood leaning against a lamp-post smoking his pipe.

"Mind you fellows keep your eyes open, and draw closer around the house. Wiffles and I are going in ; but the rascals may possibly slip through our fingers, as they know the run of the rooms and we don't. See, therefore, that they do not pass you."

"The ghosts, you mean, Mr. Brooke."

"The fiddle-stick ! ghosts be hanged ! the house is no more haunted than you are, man, unless it be by burglars, forgers, whiskey distillers, or rogues of that class. Now go and give my instructions to our mates ; I want you all close under the walls, one in front, two at the back, and be particularly careful lest any one drops from the windows by a rope."

Leaving Daley, Wiffles and I now got over the broken-down wall into the garden, which we crossed noiselessly and stealthily, and presently stood under the high frowning walls of the house.

"Now, Wiffles, look out sharp for a rope, for they must have ascended by means of one, and I think we can follow their example," I whispered.

The idea that the two figures that he had seen enter the house by one of the top story windows had attained that altitude by means of a rope had never entered Wiffles' head. He now saw the probability of the thing at once ; and in another minute all doubts as to their mode of ingress were set aside by my running my head against the identical rope itself, which depended from the middle window of the third story, and reached down to just the level of my nose.

"Who'll go first ?" asked Wiffles.

"I will ; and don't you begin to ascend until I'm safely landed, for then if any one sees me before I reach the the window and tries to cut the rope, you may perhaps be able to shoot them down," I said.

I now commenced my ascent, and being a fair climber, I did not experience much difficulty in mounting hand over

hand. In a few minutes I had gained the window and clambered through it into the room. Wiffles was not slow to follow my example, and just as the clock of a neighbouring church chimed a quarter past eleven we both of us stood within the haunted house.

It was very dark, the moonlight did not penetrate into the room, so that we could not see an inch before us. We listened, but no sound was audible, save the skiddering of a stray rat or two across the floor, and the monotonous "tick-tick-tick" of the Mimi beetle (the Australian "death-watch").

"Off with your shoes silently and quickly," I whispered to Wiffles, setting the example as I spoke.

We now groped noiselessly over the room in search of a door; at last we found one, but it was locked, and defied all our efforts to open it. We next went right round the room, feeling the wall all the way, but found no other mode of egress. Clearly there was only one door, and that we could not force open without alarming the whole house.

"It seems to me that we are sold after all," muttered Wiffles.

"Not a bit of it, my boy," I responded; "let us cross and recross the floor, but cautiously, or we may fall through a trap."

We accordingly shuffled along noiselessly to and fro, never raising our feet from the floor, until at last I felt that half my left foot rested on empty space, and stooping down, I found a large opening in the floor.

"By George, Wiffles, it's lucky I thought of this, or we should assuredly have broken our necks in falling through this precious trap. The question now is, how to reach the room below."

"There's a rope fastened to an iron ring, and with its end hanging through the hole," answered my mate.

"Then get along with you, 'tis your turn to go first now."

Jack Wiffles required no second bidding; active as a monkey, he slipped down the rope, and in a moment had gained the floor below. More leisurely I followed his example, and presently felt boards under my feet again.



"Hush! did you hear that?" asked Wiffles.

"Yes, but 'twas only a rat," I replied.

"Not a bit of it. I swear it was a human voice," retorted Wiffles, in the same low tone.

We listened, and in a moment a loud metallic crash rang through the house, awaking a dozen reverberations amid the empty rooms. Then followed the clanking of a chain and a yell of demoniac laughter.

"This is strange. Perhaps there is more truth in the common report that the house is haunted than we have credited," said my aide, in nervous tones.

"I confess that matters look rather dismal; but now that we have dared so much, we will not cry craven at a mere noise. Ghosts or thieves, I must find out their reasons for taking up a lodging here," I answered.

We now made for the wall again, and glided along it as we had done in the room above in search of another door, which we presently found, and to our satisfaction it was unlocked.

Taking a bottle of oil from my pocket, I plentifully lubricated the hinges lest they should creak, and then we opened the door, passed through, and found ourselves in a passage, for on raising my arms until with my body they formed the shape of the letter T, I could touch the walls on either side. It was still as dark as the grave around us, but at the end of the passage we were traversing we could see a narrow line of light, apparently gleaming through a crack in a door.

We soon found that this was the case, and upon looking through this fissure a strange scene met our gaze. The room into which we peered was devoid of furniture, with the exception of a couple of three-legged stools and two stretcher beds, on each of which lay a couple or so of not over-clean blankets. It was a very large room, but the carved ceiling was discoloured with damp and spiders' webs; the once rich paper was hanging in strips and tatters from the walls, and the floor was black with dirt, and thickly strewn with broken pipes and glasses. All these matters only received a mere glance, for our attention was riveted by the occupants of the two stools, who sat one on each side of the soot-begrimed

fireplace. At a glance we recognised them to be Miles Humphrey, the suicide, and the King of Burranaguck, looking just as Daley had described them the night before, and drinking raw spirits like the very deuce.

At the feet of one lay a heavy chain; against the stool of the other leant a metal gong. There was the livid mark of the rope around the throat of the white man, and on the breast of his companion lay the half-moon shaped brass plate, with its inscription in large black letters, "RUM TUM TUM, KING OF BURRANAGUCK." There could be no mistake about all this, and I confess that for a minute or two a kind of superstitious terror seized hold of me, and I began to think that we had really to do with inhabitants of the spirit world. As for Wiffles, plucky as he generally was, his teeth now began to chatter with fear, and he whispered, "This is awful!"

"Hush, man! depend upon it, there's some earthly devilry in all this," I answered. "I can't fancy that veritable ghosts swig off raw spirits at such a rate as these do. Listen, the black fellow is going to speak."

"Sure he can't with his tongue stuck down his windpipe," said Wiffles.

King Rum Tum, however, quickly proved to Mr. Wiffles that he was mistaken as far as the tongue went, for turning to his companion, he said, suddenly, "Well, Snakes, you never told me how you put off the fellow as inquired after this here house."

"Oh, the fool! I scarcely know how I managed it, for he was the most persisting varmint that I ever clapped eyes on," said the other, with an oath. "By Jingo, he wouldn't take 'no' for an answer."

"And has he given up all thoughts of the house?" asked the king, anxiously.

"Oh no, not he; but I put him off until the end of the week."

"And if he still presses you, what then?"

"Why, if he won't take civil advice, I must tell him pat and plain that he shan't have it; say that I've already let it, or that I'm going to knock it down. Darn him, he can't

make a man let his own property against his will," said the Yankee.

"Ah! ah! ah! the house pays better as it is, don't it, daddy Snakes?" laughed the black fellow.

"I believe you, my boy. I think our profits are at present to the tune of a hundred pounds a month each, so I should be a precious fool to let the place at only that rate per annum;" and the Yankee laughed until the tears ran down his cheeks.

"How lucky we were to get such a crib! we are safer from observation here than if we were in the centre of the Stony Desert. Not a human being in Adelaide, even those d——d traps included, would enter these walls, were they paid their weight in gold to do so. Come, Master Snakes, or Master Humphrey, whichever ye are called, I propose a toast."

"Hang your toasts! What is it?" growled the landlord of the "Dublin Arms."

"Why, the haunted house, you duffer! the haunted house!" he repeated in a louder key, as he staggered to his feet, and raised a brimming glass of whiskey to his lips.

"The haunted house," echoed Snakes, following his example with tipsy gravity.

"*The haunted house!*" I exclaimed, in a sepulchral tone from the passage.

"THE HAUNTED HOUSE!" shrieked Wiffles, taking his cue from me.

King Rum Tum, or rather his personator, had raised his glass to his lips, but he let it fall from his relaxed grasp when the third voice smote upon his ear; and at my mate's eldritch yell, Snakes tossed his glass and its contents into the ample fireplace, and turned yellowish brown and white by turns.

"Did you hear that?" asked the black fellow, in quivering tones.

"I did. What on earth could it have been?" faltered the landlord.

"The devil," suggested the black.

"King Rum Tum, whose name you've taken," howled Wiffles through the keyhole.

"And Miles Humphrey, who owns this house," I echoed, in a voice that seemed to come from at least ten million good leagues under ground.

By George! a peep at the two terrified impostors at that moment was worth a mine of rubies. For a minute or two they stood staring at each other like a couple of idiots; then they simultaneously fell on their knees and tried to mutter their prayers. To put an end to the ridiculous scene, I placed the muzzle of my revolver against the lock of the door, and blew it open. We then rushed in and threw ourselves upon the horror-stricken distillers, reckoning that after the fright they had just received no resistance would be offered. In this, however, we were mistaken; for the moment the rascals saw that we were veritable men, and not the spirits of those whom they had personified, their courage returned, and drawing their knives, they stood on the defensive.

"None of your knife-work, Master Snakes," I cried, covering him with my revolver. "You see I was determined to inspect the inside of this house before I took it on a twenty-one years' lease, at two hundred a year."

"Ten thousand fiends! Are you squatter Thompson that called on me this morning about the house?" demanded the astonished landlord of the "Dublin Arms."

"Squatter Thompson, or detective Brooke, at your service. I answer to either name," I replied.

"By Jabers, the traps!" cried the black fellow, in accents of despair.

"Come, my friends, just drop those pig-stickers; we want to take your measurement for a pair of wristbands," said Wiffles.

For a minute or so the fellows looked defiant, but our revolvers overawed them, and they sullenly threw down their arms and allowed themselves to be handcuffed. We then, aided by their candle, began to search the premises. There was a second door in the room where we had surprised them, which led into an adjoining apartment, and upon entering this inner room the mystery of the haunted house was solved at a glance.

It was an immense apartment—far larger than the one which we had just quitted. It was probably two or three rooms knocked into one. In it stood a large *still* in perfect working order; the boiler stood over the glowing embers, and the head and worm were attached, the latter carrying its convolutions down through a large hogshead of water, and discharging the whiskey through a pipe near the bottom into a vessel placed there to receive it. Nearly touching this vessel stood a pannikin, and close to the pannikin lay a pile of empty bags; for what purpose we could not imagine, but three-fourths of the floor of the room was covered by numbers of kegs and barrels, the greater proportion of which were filled with the mountain dew. All these were clearly revealed by the rays proceeding from a dirty oil lamp which hung by a chain from the ceiling.

Wiffles and I did not neglect to patronize the warm spirit that trickled slowly into the already nearly overflowing pannikin; and I must admit that if the *ghosts* of the haunted house were not genuine, the *spirits* were, and excellent ones to boot.

Well, after we had had a good drink we returned to the other room and rejoined the crest-fallen proprietors of the still, whom we ordered to lead the way to the street door. This they sullenly did, and we found that it was not only bolted, locked, and barred, but actually screwed on the inside. It took us nearly half an hour to get out these screws, draw back all the rusty bolts, and force it open. By the time we had done so a distant church clock struck the first hour of the morning.

We walked off our captives to the police station, and when there, the first thing that “King Rum Tum the Second” asked for was soap and water; by the aid of which he speedily transmogrified himself into a white man, and a genuine son of Erin into the bargain. The next morning our brace of worthies were marched before the Court of Petty Sessions, where, after a long trial, the still was sentenced to be confiscated, and each of the distillers to a fine of £150, or in default three months’ imprisonment with hard labour. The host of the “Dublin Arms” counted down the

cash with the air and dignity of a prince ; but his mate, shrewdly observing "that a hundred and fifty pounds was a dear price for three months' liberty, and that with their worships' leave he would accept the temporary board and lodging kindly placed at his disposal by the Government," made a serio-comic bow, and was conducted from the court by two constables.

Thus were King Rum Tum's and Miles Humphrey's ghosts laid : the two rascals who had turned the superstitious fears of the townspeople to so profitable an account were in turn taken in and done for ; - and upon the landlord of the "Dublin Arms" becoming insolvent a few months later, the old house in Charlotte Street—now a haunted house no longer—passed into other hands, and is at present, I believe, tenanted by either a homœopathic or hydropathic doctor, I forget which.

## MYSTERY AND MURDER.

WHILE in Tasmania I met with an adventure of so singular a character, that it has been the subject of much thought during my leisure hours in the intervening space of time, the more so as the mysterious portion of it remains unexplained to this day.

On an evening during one of the winter months I was seated in my quarters in Hobart Town, engaged in making memoranda of my day's occupation, when a gentleman who had requested to see me was shown into the apartment. Although he had not the slightest knowledge of me, I recognised him at once. It was Mr. Longmore, a merchant of Hobart Town, who had the character of being a steady, worthy, and withal wealthy man. He was a widower, the father of an only daughter, and resided on the outskirts of the town, in a handsome residence situated very near to that part of the Derwent which bears the name of Sullivan's Cove; in fact, its waters rippled at the bottom of Mr. Longmore's own grounds.

"I have the pleasure of speaking to Mr. Brooke, the detective officer, I believe," said he, after having at my invitation seated himself.

"Yes," I replied, "and you may spare yourself the trouble of introducing yourself, Mr. Longmore. I have the honour of knowing you well by sight, as well as by reputation."

"Well, I suppose I need not be surprised at your recognising me," replied he, with a staid smile, "although I do not recollect having ever met you before; but it is quite in your way to be observant."

"It is, sir; and now in what manner can my present services avail you?"

I could not help noticing that the gentleman looked uneasy and hesitant, and not at all easy in his conversation, as I should have expected to find a man of the world as Mr. Longmore.

"I scarcely know what to say to you, Mr. Brooke," shifting uneasily upon his chair. "I came with the purpose of disclosing to you something so extraordinary and singular as to be scarcely credible, and now I am doubly inclined to fear that its very singularity may occasion doubts in your mind as to my judgment or want of common sense."

"You need not be at all afraid, Mr. Longmore," I responded, encouragingly, "that I shall draw any false inference from any communication that you may do me the honour of making to me in confidence. Your well-known character as a gentleman of clear judgment and sound common sense is a sufficient guarantee that any information you may give me, or communication you may make, will be well worthy of attention."

"Thank you!" replied he, "but in this matter I am positively afraid that my ordinary judgment is at fault; but if you can afford me time I will relate the circumstances, and allow you to form your own opinion upon the matter." Of course I signified my readiness—nay, anxiety to listen, and Mr. Longmore commenced thus:—

"My house is, as I dare say you know, at this side of the suburbs, and quite near to the river. I reside in it with my only daughter and three servants, one male and two females. The house has no upper story; the front windows are French, all open into the grounds; the back part of the establishment, stables, yard, &c., being separated from the front gardens by a high stone wall. Into the back yard the kitchen and ordinary apartments open, so that unless *through* the house itself no communication can be held by any of the servants with the pleasure-grounds; unless, indeed, they were to go down and approach by the river. I tell you all this so that you may be in the same position as I have found myself, as to the possibility of finding a natural solution of the singular



difficulty which I am about to relate to you. The door of communication between the front and back portions of my house I am particularly careful to secure every night myself, my early residence in the colony having made me very cautious in guarding against surprise of any kind, and my daughter's safety is of greater moment than my own, so that I am even more careful in these matters than I might have been.

"This night week I had retired at my usual hour, or perhaps a little later. Everything was quiet, my daughter as well as the servants had gone to their rooms some time before.

It was a wild, dark night, but as I burn a lamp in my room it is of course lighted, although dimly. For some time I had been asleep, what awoke me I cannot tell; the first thing on which my eyes rested was a form—a figure, or the semblance of one: it was standing at the foot of my bed, and was that of a female! I was not alarmed, for the idea that it was my daughter immediately suggested itself, so I raised myself upon my elbow for the purpose of asking if anything was the matter. As soon as I did so I instantly perceived that the face was strange to me.

"The figure was slight, attired in a white robe; the features had a horrible expression of terror, and their death-like pallor was increased by the contrast presented by the longest and heaviest black hair I ever saw, which hung over her left breast and reached down to her knees. Her dress was of silken material, for I heard it rustling; and all over the front, and also upon the loose sleeves, it was clotted with blood."

Here the narrator stopped, apparently quite overcome with the recollection of the scene that he had been describing, and I must confess that I could hardly repress a smile at such emotion being felt by a person of Mr. Longmore's sense and experience, about such a piece of absurdity; and I dare say he read the expression of my feelings in my face, for he remarked,—

"I can scarcely feel surprised that you should be inclined to treat the matter as a joke, Mr. Brooke; it is a very singular story to relate, and I do not expect you to give it credence without proving its truth yourself."

"Oh, I hope, sir," I hastened to observe, "you do not

suppose for a moment that I doubt your veracity, only to my professional mind the *apparition* looks very like a hoax which some one is playing off upon you ; but if you will narrate the facts we can talk of these things afterwards."

"I have very little to add. The appearance which I have described has visited me every night—in spite of barred doors and windows,—each time waving its hand impatiently, as if beckoning me to follow."

"And you never followed?"

"No ! I must confess that I felt too horrified to attempt moving whilst the figure stood so immediately before me. I felt frozen to the bed, as it were ; indeed, I assure you it is a fearful sight !"

"Will you permit me to inquire, Mr. Longmore, are you at all superstitious?"

"In the sense *you* mean I am not superstitious. If I met with anything so peculiar in appearance as to be quite beyond the ordinary run of natural events, before setting it down to be supernatural or apparitional I should certainly do my utmost to find a natural cause or causes for it, as I have done in this instance ; failing in that, I am ready to acknowledge there are 'more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy.' Still, had I been as really superstitious as you appear to think me, I should not have been here to ask your more practised assistance in trying to unravel this mystery."

"Well," I replied, laughingly, "I am inclined to feel certain that we shall easily prove this visitation not to be one from a spiritual kingdom ; for in truth, Mr. Longmore, I do not believe in ghosts !"

"Because you have never seen one."

I did not reply to this observation, as I perceived that his nerves had been much affected, and not without wonder ; the appearance of such a figure in one's bedroom night after night, in spite of locks and bolts, was enough to shake any man's judgment ; nevertheless, I had not the slightest doubt that the professional cunning upon which I prided myself would expose the trick of some conspiracy, formed, I was sure, for no good purpose.

"Have you mentioned this to any one, Mr. Longmore?"

"No, I have not; I was afraid of alarming my daughter. I do sincerely hope that you will be able to get to the bottom of it. The knowledge of such an unaccountable visitation, such a horrible appearance, being night after night in the immediate neighbourhood of my unsuspecting child is almost overwhelming me. Now what steps will you take?"

I considered for a moment before I answered, and then mentioned my intention of spending that night in Mr. Longmore's bedroom.

"Could you get in without any one suspecting that you had a visitor?" I inquired; "and could you manage to let me occupy your room in secrecy also?"

"Oh, easily enough. Only name the hour you will be at the side entrance into the garden, and I will admit you myself. It is usual after dusk for me to smoke my cigar near the river."

Having made suitable arrangements Mr. Longmore left me.

I sat down and considered the matter on all sides. What was the object in thus acting the ghost in the bedroom of a man of Mr. Longmore's well-known strength of mind? From what I knew of that gentleman's character I was much surprised at the weakness he had shown, the earthly, and I had no doubt criminal nature of which only wanted a little keen-sighted perseverance to be proved.

As to ghosts, and entrances effected without any existing means of ingress—bah! it was all fudge. My intention, in the first place, was to see, if possible, this singular apparition; and while-doing nothing more than simply affecting to be the ordinary occupier of Mr. Longmore's bed, for the first night to make good use of my eyes, and be guided in any further attempts at unravelment by my observations. Well, at the appointed time I was conducted by Mr. Longmore into his bedroom, the servants, as well as Miss Longmore, having retired. I was at liberty to examine the room at leisure. The apartment was a good size, perhaps sixteen feet by twenty-two, and had two large French windows that opened on a verandah which ran along the front of the house. These windows consisted

each of a single sheet of plate glass in handsome mahogany framework, and faced directly the Derwent, called, as I have before mentioned, at that spot, Sullivan's Cove. With its head against the wall, opposite to the windows, stood a large elegant bedstead, with a canopy at the head, from which depended rich damask curtains, that only formed a shelter to the head of the bedstead, leaving the foot entirely unprotected. On the right hand of the bed was the door opening into a dressing-room, which communicated with the other portion of the establishment. By the wall at the left was the toilet-table; upon it stood a deeply shaded night lamp. There was also a chimney in the room, but as the grate was one of the stove description I did not trouble myself about it. The windows and doors I left entirely to Mr. Longmore's inspection, taking his word that they were fastened as usual.

When this was all right we seated ourselves beside a table, where my entertainer had taken care to have refreshment, and after partaking of a glass of wine I lit my cigar, begging my host to excuse my invariable practice before retiring. It had not escaped my keen observation that the gentleman on whose behalf I had volunteered to encounter a ghost had shown indubitable signs of a mind ill at ease ever since he had ushered me into his house. Taking advantage of the wreaths of smoke that soon curled up between my lips, I watched him as he sat opposite to me more closely than I should otherwise have had an opportunity of doing.

He was gazing down at the floor, occasionally sipping his wine in an abstracted manner, with a thoughtful and troubled expression upon his face, but looking up once, and encountering my eyes steadfastly, and I suspect searchingly, fixed upon his countenance, he became red and pale by turns, and at length addressed me hurriedly.

"I am afraid, Mr. Brooke, that I have done wrong in this business, as I have given you trouble, I think. I believe I should have told you everything."

"Certainly, Mr. Longmore," was my reply. "If you seek my professional services I think I have a right to learn everything you know in connection with it."

"It is true ; it is quite true. And yet I think you will make allowance for my disinclination to speak of this circumstance. There are some things of the past so painful that I may be excused if I feel a disinclination to allude to them."

"Well, sir, if you regret having mentioned the subject to me, forget that you have done so, and nobody shall be the wiser."

"No, no ; you quite mistake me. I am anxious to tell you at once of what I should have informed you before, and it is simply that this—this apparition bears the semblance of one with whom I was too well acquainted."

"May I ask of whom?"

"My wife!"

"Your wife?" I exclaimed, and then checked myself at once as the cause of Mr. Longmore's awkwardness and evident trouble of mind flashed before me. I now remembered having heard a great deal of gossip about this said wife. She had eloped years before from this very house in a most disgraceful manner, and with a most unprincipled, low rascal. I respected my host's feelings of course, and felt grieved that anything should have occurred with which I had any connection to bring the memory of the transaction again before him.

"And you think the figure resembles that person?" I inquired.

"It is herself!" was the determined reply.

"Well, I must say I think it very likely it is. What more probable than that she should be acquainted with some outlet from this room which you do not know?"

Mr. Longmore shook his head.

"It is not she *alive*," he said.

"Do you then really and positively believe that this visitation is a supernatural one?" I asked, in much surprise.

"I do! I am willing that every means of discovery shall be tried; but when you have seen *it*, I think you will acknowledge that I *must* believe it is supernatural."

This was very positive and very singular to me. That any man in these days of enlightenment, and possessed of his full

allowance of brains, should insist upon the *existence* of a ghost—if I am not making a “bull” in so saying—was a matter beyond my comprehension; and as I turned into Mr. Longmore’s stately bed, after he had taken up his quarters on a couch in the dressing-room, I am afraid I allowed myself to consider for a moment how long in all probability it was likely to be ere this far-seeing merchant should become the inmate of an asylum, where the beds would not be half so soft or the rooms so luxurious as the one which I occupied as the temporary tenant of this “haunted house.” My clothes I had not removed, and my revolver lay handy; indeed, since the last communication of my host, I made up my mind to bring the matter to an end that night. This ghost, be it as active as it liked, would have to use all its supernatural power to enable it to escape from my clutches; for I had no doubt that I should succeed in “grabbing” the *late* Mrs. Longmore before she had time to invoke the powers of darkness, or find her usual mode of egress. An officer of ten years’ experience in the detective force was not born yesterday! And so I lay thinking over things quietly, hour after hour striking upon the ornamental clock that stood upon the mantelpiece, until it was half-past one.

It was a cloudy night, a chill wind blew up from the cove, which made a sighing and sad whispering among the trees that shaded the house; the lately risen moon—now streaming in through the verandah, and casting shadows of vine leaves and creepers upon the carpet—shadows that waved and shook, as the agitated air waved and shook the foliage outside—was occasionally obscured, and left the room almost in complete darkness, as I had screwed down the lamp as low as possible. I had made up my mind by this time that the conspirator or conspirators had found out my presence in the apartment, and had thought it safer not to attempt any of their pranks upon me. At this moment the moon became cloudy, the room was nearly, but not quite in darkness; when suddenly, and without any apparent reason—I had seen nothing, I had heard nothing—I felt myself getting cold, cold as the dead; and then, and not until then, I heard a rustling as it were of silk; involuntarily my eyes settled upon the space at the foot

of the bed, a distinct shadow was there, but only a shadow, out of which my eyes could form no distinct figure or semblance; in a second or two it grew white—whiter; at length against the dark background the white-dressed woman stood out visibly and clearly; the long hair hanging unfastened over her left breast, with blood spattered on the white silk of her robe! But her face—oh, how horrible! I could not help feeling it impossible for a living face to look so by any contrivance whatever. I was horror-stricken—I could not breathe. I felt as if all my faculties were frozen; my eyes were fixed on that ghostly figure, which now lifted an arm and waved, as if to follow. The face of this woman, as Mr. Longmore had said, was full of combined agony and terror. Although this continued only a few seconds, I was for the time paralyzed. I made an effort, however. “Am I going to allow myself to be made a laughingstock?” Perhaps the touch of the pistol, which I felt at this moment against my fingers, helped to recall me to myself; at any rate, I bounded out of bed, rushed toward the figure, resolved to grapple with it to the death. It was gone! not a moment did I lose. I pushed back the bolt of the window, near which the figure had disappeared, opened it, and rushed on the verandah. There stood the phantom on the lawn, rendered now visible by the moonlight; it was still beckoning to me to come! Worked up to frenzy, I took a steady aim at the vision with my revolver; I fired, and then rushed toward it again. There it was, but a little farther off—still beckoning, and so I followed and followed, without appearing to gain on it in the slightest degree. The report of the pistol had aroused Mr. Longmore, who now joined me.

The figure in white moved in the direction of the river, which, as I have before said, was in front of the house; the grounds belonging to Mr. Longmore extended down to it. The shrubbery went round a grassy hollow not far from the water, in a spot so low that it was occasionally a receptacle for the surplus rain-water that lodged in it, and formed a pond. At the time I write it was quite dry, and I only became aware afterwards from Mr. Longmore that such had frequently been the case. On reaching the centre of this

grassy hollow the figure stopped until we came within a distance of about twenty yards, and then, wildly tossing its clasped hands above its head, appeared to fall prone upon the earth. Not only was there nothing on the ground when we reached it, but there was nothing to see nor hear on the shore, or in the shrubbery; not a vestige of anything did the most rigid search discover; and as the moon had again become invisible, Mr. Longmore and I went back to the "haunted room." He was as pale as a corpse, and I freely confess I was not sorry to be helped to a glass of wine.

"What do you think of it?" he whisperingly inquired.

"Let us speak of it by daylight, sir," I replied, flinging myself upon a sofa; and, in truth, I was positively ashamed to say what I *did* think of it. As soon as it was light I commenced a thorough examination of the room. I could make nothing of it.

I could *not* account for the entrance of the bullet-proof visitant of the night. I then walked to the foot of the lawn, and sat down close to the spot where the figure had vanished; being an inveterate smoker, I took a cigar to clear my intellect and soothe my agitation.

As I smoked I observed at the bottom of this little hollow, the ground, which elsewhere was covered with green, fresh-looking grass, strown for a small space with a layer composed of what appeared to be a mixture of dead leaves, chips, and rushes, mixed with some kind of soil; in short, just such a sediment as might have been left as the deposit of a dried-up pool. On a closer examination I fancied I could detect signs of a late disturbance of the soil in that particular place. What could have suggested to me the idea of making a search in the ground there I am totally unable to explain; it was one of those singularly instinctive thoughts for which there is no accounting; certain it is, however, that I at once decided, before I took another step in the matter, to get the assistance of one of the force to examine this hollow before any person would be likely to be on the river or about to make observations on our movements.

Returning to the house, I found Mr. Longmore just dressing, looking miserably pale and wretched. I felt sorry for



the man, but as my silence I had no doubt would be more grateful to him than any sympathy, I merely informed him of my intention, and taking the key of the side gate, went toward the police camp.

Going along Macquarie Street, I fortunately met the very man I should have chosen as an assistant where I wished for a closed mouth. I despatched him for tools, and when he joined me we proceeded on our return to Mr. Longmore's.

"What do you expect to find?" inquired that gentleman, who stood beside us when we commenced shovelling the loose soil from the place.

I could only shake my head, and in a few moments my companion's spade scraped against some wooden substance ; at the empty, hollow sound Mr. Longmore's face grew death-like.

"Perhaps you had better go up to the house, sir," I said.

"No," he replied, with an effort ; "go on !"

Quickly, then, we uncovered a deal case with a loosely fastened, ill-fitting lid : it was about four feet long by three wide, and perhaps two feet deep ; it looked like a soft goods' case, which I dare say it had been.

Well, we lifted it from the hole, Mr. Longmore still standing silent and inactive beside us ; and I am certain that I was more surprised than either of my companions at the result of our labours, as I was the one who really knew how entirely without reasonable cause I had set to work with spade and shovel in that unlikely place. As soon as the box was set upon the ground I prised off the rough lid with my spade, and it fell over to the side, exposing a lining of zinc, which was bent down without any attempt at evenness, and entirely concealed what remained below it. We unfolded it bit by bit, gradually exposing an object of horror so terrible that I wish I had never seen it !

Many a night since—when some midnight duty has found me on a lonely patrol—have I fancied, in the darkness, the figure in that deal box. It was a dead woman ! and the *fac-simile* of the phantom that visited me in the darkness of the night before ! The figure lay upon its right side, the knees slightly drawn up so as to enable it to fit in the case ; and it

was dressed in the identical rich white silk, every fold of which seemed familiar to me.

The long, heavy black hair was loose, and gathered at one side lay scattered over the left shoulder ; and upon the skirt of the blood-stained dress, and under the hair, where it lay clogged and clotted, remained still the handle of a Spanish knife—the blade had passed through the unfortunate woman's heart ! Although the body lay upon its side, as the space was confined, the head was turned so that the face looked upward, with the glaring wide open eyes fixed in a look so full of fear and horror that I can never forget it, and with one glance at the well-known face, Mr. Longmore sank to the ground in a swoon. He had recognised his wife !

It passed over in the usual way—an inquest resulting in an open verdict, and a large offered reward posted on the walls, and printed in the *Gazette*. Mr. Longmore had long left Hobart Town, glad to escape anywhere from a place so fraught with horrible memories.

One night I was seated in the same room where, twelve months before, Mr. Longmore had sought and found me about this business of mysterious termination, when a tall young man of seventeen inquired for me, and gained admittance. He looked like a sailor, in his hand he held a paper, which he opened and handed to me ; it was one of the posters to which I have alluded, commencing under the offered reward with the usual "Whereas," &c. The paper was torn and partly destroyed, but not sufficiently to hinder one from perusing the principal parts of it.

"I suppose you remember that, sir ?" said the young man. When I replied in the affirmative, he entered into the following narrative, which I shall give as nearly as possible in his own words.

"I only came to this port last night, and to-day I went into a shop to buy some toggery, the woman wrapped some of the things in that paper ; when I came to look it over, I thought I could give some information about it, and when I told a policeman he referred me to you."

"Well, then, my man," I replied, "sit down and tell me what you can."

"Nearly twelve months ago I belonged to a brig called the *Water Snake*, owned and commanded by a man of the name of Walter Cuvier."

I rather started at this, as Walter Cuvier was the name of the man with whom the murdered Mrs. Longmore had eloped.

"I was cabin boy in the *Water Snake*, and had been in that brig a couple of years."

"Can you tell me what Captain Cuvier did with his vessel? In what trade was he?"

"You know, sir, that was none of my business. He traded on his own account, and I think principally in contraband goods. Well, as I said before, I was cabin boy in the *Water Snake*, and all the time I was in her the captain had his wife with him, at least a woman who passed for his wife, and I do believe that the body found in this bill was the woman we used to call Mrs. Cuvier."

"What makes you think so?"

"I think I am sure of it, and I'll tell you why, sir. The captain and the missis did not live very comfortable at times, and when he was drunk he was a real brute; and the missis herself I am certain took a drop too much, so they had terrible shindies. Well, we came from Calcutta here, and, tired of being kicked and cuffed, I determined to bolt the very first chance, and give Cuvier leg-bail for it. We cast anchor in the cove last May, and that very night, as I was in the pantry washing up the glasses, I heard such a row between the captain and the missis in their state-room, she insisting on 'going back' somewhere, crying her eyes out all the time, and he swearing he'd kill her first, until at last he told her to 'go back and be ——.' Shortly after the captain ordered the boat to be lowered. He took me into the cabin to help him with a box like the one described in this; and as I went back to get something he had forgotten, I saw Mrs. Cuvier getting ready to go ashore. She was dressed very handsome, and it looked like a white silk gown she had got on. She gave me a glass of wine, and shook hands with me, saying she was going to leave the ship and go to her friends. I thought nothing of it, having, as I said before,

heard the talk between her and the captain. Well, I and one of the sailors rowed them ashore, and landed them on the beach near some trees. It was a squally, dark night. So Mrs. Cuvier shook hands with the other man, and bid him good-bye. The captain told us to shove off again, and wait for him up at a tavern he pointed out along shore, as he had a few words to say to the missis before he went; and then he gave us the price of a drink or two, so we went off, leaving him and herself sitting on the box that he said had the woman's clothes in. That was the very last time I saw them, for as soon as my mate had a glass or two I took the chance and made tracks, and stowed myself aboard the ship *Chester*, that sailed for Calcutta the next morning; and that's all I know about it."

"And you never saw or heard of Cuvier or his vessel since?"

"No, sir; and if I had I'd have given both her and him a wide berth."

And I have never heard of him since. Perhaps he still lives to drag a miserable consciousness of his crime through a wretched existence. Many a time have I pictured to myself the unfortunate and guilty woman returning to the neighbourhood of her husband and child whom she had disgraced, and no doubt still loved and yearned to see! How often, during the abuse and ill usage of him for whom she had sacrificed everything, had her breaking heart prayed for the peace and rest of the home she had left! And then, resolved to brave all—to throw herself at the feet of her injured husband—to beg the intercession of her child—did the demon murder her upon the threshold of her hopes?—within sight of the very window-lights of the home she longed to enter once more? And who can tell who and what was the midnight visitor to Mr. Longmore's bedroom? Was it the bodily presence of some one acquainted with the murder, and who wished the affair to be known without being recognised? To solve the mystery in that manner seemed impossible, considering all the opposing circumstances. And thus it has remained unravelled to this day—a mystery into which I carried the closest investigation without being wiser by the inquiry.

## HOMeward BOUND, VIA PANAMA.

It was a splendid summer's morning in the December of 1856 when I went on board the American steamship *Golden Age*, which was lying alongside Circular Quay, Sydney, just getting up her steam for her long voyage across the Pacific to Panama.

This was her second trip, her former one, accomplished in the previous year, having been the first passage performed by a steamship between those two ports; and as in about two months from the present time (26th of March, 1866) a fine line of mail packets will be established from Sydney to England by way of New Zealand and the Isthmus of Panama, which, on account of the shortness of the passage and the moderate fares (I use the term moderate as compared with those charged by the Peninsular and Oriental Company at the present time) will doubtless induce thousands of persons to choose this way of journeying to or returning from the southern colonies of Great Britain, a few notes of my voyage may not prove uninteresting or out of place.

To begin, then, we were one hundred and forty-four passengers of all classes, on board a natty new steamship of about 1300 tons register, which at three o'clock in the afternoon tripped anchor and moved majestically down the beautiful harbour of Port Jackson towards the sea. We had soon left the Heads astern, and, aided by a stiff breeze from the S. W., were off for Tahiti with a kind of rocking-horse motion, that cleared the decks in no time, and sent at least three-fourths of the passengers to their berths, from whence the majority of them did not show their noses for some days. I, with the

doctor and about eight others, had the dinner-table to ourselves during this period, or rather we shared it with the captain and the first mate, and thus I was one of the few who saw Lord Howe's Islands, which we steamed close by only two days after leaving port.

Their aspect, though not grand, was nevertheless pleasing, set as they were, like emeralds, in a sea of azure hue ; and as the sun sunk behind the high peak of the centre isle, the bare mountain sides seemed to reflect salmon colour and violet tints. The captain told us that one of these isles contained a settlement of about forty-five inhabitants.

Three days after losing sight of Lord Howe's group we passed within a similar distance of Norfolk Isle. It looked like a very picture of fairy land, owing partly to the richness of its vegetation, for trees and flowering shrubs seemed to grow down to the very water's edge, and from over the blue expanse of sea we could hear the delicious song of forest birds. This lovely isle was then the abode of felons, but they no longer defile its shores, for at present it forms the abode of the descendants of the mutineers of the *Bounty*, the narrative of which our readers are doubtlessly acquainted with.

We now saw no more land for a week, and during that period we only sighted one vessel, which proved to be a whaler called the *Porpoise*, from Hobart Town, ten months out. We passed close by her, and exchanged some bags of potatoes, of which they were in want, for some dry fish.

Two days after parting company with the whaler we sailed close along the shores of Roro Tonga, and saw crowds of half clad natives on the beach. It was a pretty sight to look upon,—the calm blue ocean laving the snow white sands, in the rear of which flourished the richest of tropical vegetation, forming a background to and throwing out in clear relief the whitewashed, shingle-roofed, green-verandahed mission house and pretty square-towered church, surrounded by cocoanut, pineapple, and bread-fruit trees, amid which were perched, in charming irregularity and confusion, the huts of the hardy islanders.

The great charm of the Panama route is that you see nearly

as much land as sea. Thus, within a fortnight of leaving Sydney, we had thrice sailed close by lovely islands, besides sighting others in the dim distance; and now another two days brought us into the calm waters of Papiti Bay, the port of Tahiti.

In entering this bay we just grated our keel on a coral reef, but luckily sustained no damage. A month previously a French merchantman had gone to pieces on the same reef, in a furious gale, and every soul on board had perished. Half-an-hour later we dropt anchor, having accomplished 4,100 miles in fifteen days, a slow run, the average passage being thirteen and a half days.

At Tahiti, or Otaheite, we stayed a week, to coal and water. Why we did this I could never imagine, for both might have been effected in three working days, but as it afforded fine opportunities for excursions into the interior I did not object to the delay, in fact I rather rejoiced at it. Certainly Tahiti is one of the most charming islands in the world, and I cannot wonder at the fascination it exercised over the officers and crew of the *Bounty*. There is an air of unreality about it that is very charming. The town itself is pretty, but non-descript, presenting a picture of mingled French, English, and barbaric life that is both romantic and amusing. The military bakehouse is about the largest, though at the same time, the ugliest structure in the place; and the fluttering union jack, the stars and stripes, the tricolour, and the gawdy Tahitian banner, denote respectively the residence of the French governor, the houses of the English and American consuls, and the palace of Queen Pomare. Then there are the military barracks, the magazine, and various other European buildings of every conceivable shape and size, mingled with hundreds of picturesque native huts, while around and about grow the branching bread fruit, the bushy guavas, and scores of other tropical trees and shrubs whose names are legion; and high above all, over-topping hut and palace, wave the graceful heads of the magnificent cocoa nut trees, as though to shield the dwellings of man from the rays of the burning sun; and in the background, rearing their evergreen summits nine thousand feet up into the deep blue cloudless

sky, stretch a range of mountains of surpassing majesty of form and grouping.

There is but one good street in Tahiti, but that one runs alongside the beach, and affords a most lively and cheerful promenade. Soldiers in glittering uniforms, military bands, lounging civilians, the lady portion of whom are attired in the latest modes of Paris fashion; fruit-sellers carrying curiously shaped baskets, overflowing with luscious pine apples, bananas, pomegranates, and passion fruit; native ladies attired in loosely flowing drapery à la Watteau, composed of gaily-coloured, large-patterned, cotton stuffs, walking or chatting in groups, or lying at full length on sofas outside their houses, gazing half sleepily at the still waters of the bay, which ripple in on the crescent-shaped beach within a stone's throw of this delightful promenade.

In this bay lay a small French squadron, consisting of a frigate, a corvette, two twelve-gun brigs, and a small war steamer. There was a merchantman or two lying closer in shore, and our own ship, which, with the exception of the French frigate, was at that time the largest vessel in Tahitian waters. Amid these ships the canoes of the natives, although generally laden with fruit nearly to the water's edge, would dart in and out like fireflies, while their occupants would screech and halloo at the top of their voices, as if mere strength of lung would make their guttural gibberish understood.

At Tahiti there is a market too, where fish, flesh, and fowl may be obtained at low prices, and fruit and vegetables at a mere song. There is also a nice carriage road for some miles out of town, running between cocoa-nut, bread-fruit, orange and apple trees. The oranges are as big as melons, but the apples scarcely larger than apricots. They are both, however, of delicious flavour, and together with other fruits may be had for the picking. As for the natives, the women are beautifully formed and not bad looking, but the men are miserable objects, as the black man always is when half civilized.

During our sojourn in the island I was lucky enough to see the Queen. I had read much of her beauty and her



superb figure, but I had forgotten that the work wherein I had perused this flattering description was some twenty-five years old. The consequence was, that I was disappointed, for Queen Pomare was very fat, very plain, and apparently about forty-five years of age. She was attired in a long loose gown of bright red silk, and her head was uncovered.

I might describe many more strange things that I saw in Tahiti had I but the space to do so, but I must resume my voyage.

It was a lovely morning upon which *The Golden Age* steamed out of Papiti Bay, and most of us were rather sorrowful at saying farewell to land, for we did not expect to see aught but the blue Pacific until we approached the New World of Columbus. We were, however, pleasureably disappointed, for in less than twenty-four hours after the blue mountain peaks of Otaheite had disappeared below the far horizon, we sighted the Pomatu Islands.

There are upwards of a hundred of them, but we only saw nine. They are coral islands, and have no mountains or even cliffs. They seem to be on a level nearly with the sea, but possess a rich vegetation, immense cocoa-nut and other trees, and a numerous Christian population, converts to the zealous efforts of Catholic missionaries from Otaheite.

A week after passing these islands the cry of "Land, ho!" from the look-out at the masthead proclaimed that we were approaching Panama, and that the first half of our voyage was nearly over. The day before we sighted the American coast we had a funeral on board, a female third class passenger having died from dysentery. The body was committed to the deep amid the impressive burial service of the Catholic church.

We dropped anchor at Panama on the 20th January; and were immediately surrounded by dozens of boats, the owners of which intimated in broken English, delivered in stentorian tones, that they would take us ashore at a charge of two pounds each. A modest demand, considering that the distance was not more than a quarter of a mile. As, however, the captain would not allow the ship's boats to be lowered, we were obliged to submit to this imposition.

It happened to be only the first of many. Before we could touch the beach, a crowd of hallooing, gesticulating, half-clad rascals rushed down to the water's edge, and kept the boats back, insisting that it was their privilege to carry us ashore on their backs, in return for a dollar a head; and directly I felt myself on my feet, my possum rug was seized by one fellow, my hat-box by another, my walking-stick by a third, and myself by half a dozen, each pulling in a different direction in the hope of dragging me to the particular hotel or boarding-house of which he happened to be touter. Every one of us was served in the same way, with the exception of the third class passengers, who, I suppose, did not seem worth such obtrusive attention. We only stayed at Panama about twenty-four hours, but during that time I think I saw everything that was worth seeing there. It is a tolerably large town, but it is very old, and not too clean. Half its public buildings are falling to decay; twelve out of its twenty-three churches are gone past repairing, and half the others seem hurrying the same way. The barracks certainly did not contain more than a dozen soldiers, and the battery, which overlooked the harbour, held upwards of forty splendid brass guns, but most of them were unmounted, rusty, or otherwise unfit to be used.

In Panama, as in other tropical towns, vultures seemed to be the chief scavengers and inspectors of nuisances, and I doubt not that but for them fever and cholera would destroy a thirty per cent. larger number of the inhabitants than they do at present; for every kind of filth is thrown into the streets, and you may see these zealous and never-tiring birds in dozens, ay, scores at a time, clearing it away, and so tame are they (for no Panamese would hurt a vulture, and that the clever birds know well enough) that they will scarcely deign to get out of your way.

Panama has numerous cafés, a music-hall, and a theatre. In the latter structure the people of Panama crowded to witness the acting of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Kean, in the year 1865, and accorded those talented artistes an enthusiastic welcome, though I fancy that nine-tenths of them could not have understood a word of the English language.

While at Panama I twice attended divine service at the cathedral, which is dedicated, I think, to San Antonio, but I would not be certain. There is nothing very remarkable in the structure within or without, and owing to having been despoiled and pillaged during recent civil broils, its relics and gifts are few, and the poverty of the clergy very great. Take it all in all, Panama is not a spot one would care to abide in long; true, its women are lovely and graceful, but fall into the sere and yellow leaf when about twenty-five years of age. The men I cannot say so much for, and they are too ready with the knife to be very pleasant fellows to deal with. The town is dull, too, and not at all healthy. Yellow Jack sometimes levies heavy contributions on the inhabitants, and cholera pays occasional calls, in spite of the scavenger vultures. I was not sorry, therefore, after a tolerably good breakfast, to find myself at the railway station, where the train was just about to start for Aspinwall, which was our port of departure on the Atlantic side of the Isthmus.

We were a trainful; all in good health and high spirits. The journey from Panama to Aspinwall, from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic, is accomplished in four hours, the distance being fifty-nine miles. From the conical summits of the mountains, which run through the centre of the Isthmus, from north to south, the two oceans can be distinctly seen, or, at least, I was informed so, and I have no doubt truly, as the Isthmus is never more than sixty, and in one place only thirty-five miles across. I never enjoyed a railway jaunt so much in my life as the one from Panama to Aspinwall, the tropical forests through which we passed being so magnificent that I cannot describe them. Flowers of every tint and form that imagination can picture, trees of every height and hue of green, many cumbered with heavy wax-like parasitical plants to their very summits, and amid these, dark myriads of gaudily plumaged birds and painted butterflies. This beauty, however, is deadly; the heavily perfumed air is a baneful poison, and no less than *six thousand* navvies died from the Isthmus fever while constructing the railway we were traversing.

Arrived at Aspinwall, we found the mail steamer *Shannon* getting up her steam, and half an hour after we got on board she set sail.

A week later we called at St. Thomas, one of the West India Islands, but we only stopped there a day and night, and during that time I did not quit the ship. It was the 13th January when we quitted St. Thomas for Southampton, which we hoped to reach within a fortnight, as we had no other ports to touch at on the way.

The weather continued fine and the sea calm ; but as it was now all sea, and nothing but the sea, we began to grow dull, and in the evenings the cabin passengers would form themselves into little coteries and cliques, and lounge or lie about the decks, telling anecdotes and spinning yarns.

The increasing coldness of the evenings soon put a stop to the lounge on deck, with the consequent story-telling and flirting, and in a few days after leaving St. Thomas these modes of killing time gave place to the social rubber, cribbage, chess, and backgammon, while the young lady part of the community displayed a sudden enthusiasm in the prosecution of embroidery, crochet, and Berlin wool work ; these in turn gave way to packing up, hunting for lost books, &c., and chatting about approaching separation ; for the look-out one bright frosty morning, gave the welcome shout, "Land on the larboard bow !" and the captain, in reply to our anxious queries, informed us that it was the Lizard Head, and he trusted by sun-down we should be at anchor in Plymouth Sound.

He was right, for we passed inside the Breakwater at four o'clock in the afternoon, and dropped anchor off Drake's Island, having steamed 14,000 miles in sixty days ; or, deducting the time we were detained in places we called at, fifty-two sailing days.

Together with many 'more, I determined to land at Plymouth in preference to sailing up Channel, by which means we reached town nearly two days earlier than those who went on to Southampton.

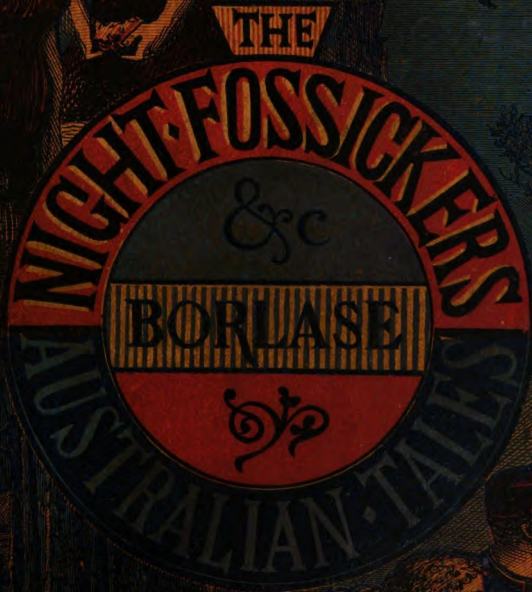
How charming the din and bustle of dear old London seemed after my long absence in a colony ; I truly rejoiced to

tread my native land again, and a thick London fog gave me more pleasure than anything I had felt for the preceding four years. The sea voyage had restored me to perfect health, and having a taste for the detective branch of the police service, I determined to invest the money I had saved whilst in the colonies, and to start a private inquiry office in the City.

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THE END.

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